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# SCRUTINY

## A Quarterly Review

*Edited by*

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# AFTER TEN YEARS

## EDITORIAL

IN this number, on war-time paper and a crowded page, *Scrutiny* completes its tenth year. To persist under present conditions implies (among other things) some assurance of function. The belief that the function served by *Scrutiny* is not less a matter of proper concern now than it was in time of peace has been given encouragement in a good many hortatory messages. We have been reminded that, while the handful of serious reviews coming from America—they were never very generally accessible on this side of the Atlantic, but their existence mitigated the sense of vacancy—has, since the American entry into the war, been suddenly reduced to the point where we must fear a complete extinction[1], here there has been nothing to set against the loss of the *Criterion* ; and that, further, this country fosters the export of books and takes official steps to bring home to the world that there is an English literature and a living British culture. However it is not the special difficulties of the moment that we are inclined to stress, but the difficulties of the past, and the fact that *Scrutiny* has continued for ten years: it seems to us not merely something done, but, in a sense, something proved.

A brief recall of the situation of ten years back will explain this feeling. As a serious critical organ, maintaining a continuity of the critical function above the level of mere journalism, *The Criterion* stood alone. A flourishing criticism is a matter of co-operation—the co-operation that is constituted by difference, tension and interplay; but *The Calendar of Modern Letters,* defunct in 1927, had had no successor, and the history of that brilliant and lively organ made it quite plain that no successor could be expected. When in discussions of the ' cultural situation ' one made this point it often met with the reply that there was nothing here for sorrow ; a preoccupation with cultural matters that wasn't politically serious (or seriously political) deserved neither attention nor respect—' politically serious,' of course, meant something of the Marxising kind. This was the onset of the period of *Left Review, New Writing,* and *The Mind in Chains.*[2] And to this argument and this philosophy one saw little satisfaction in theoretical replies.

To ask what can be done is to ask what opportunity lies in front of you in your own particular situation. Those concerned in founding

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[1]We had supposed that *The Kenyon Review* alone was left, but *Partisan Review* for March-April has just arrived. *The Southern Review* has ceased publication.

It is worth noting that the March issue of that specialized organ, *Poetry,* contains a long poem by St.-Jean Perse.

[2]Reviewed in *Scrutiny* for September, 1937.

*Scrutiny* were situated at a university. A university of its very nature (or ' idea '), if it is one at all, asserts a contrary view of cultural tradition to the Marxian; a view of cultural tradition as representing the active function of human intelligence, choice, and will ; that is, as a spiritual force that can direct and determine. The promoters of *Scrutiny* didn't say that they were bent, in their zeal on behalf of ' the function of criticism,' on vindicating at the same time ' the Idea of a University ' : they may well have felt that to put it in those terms would have been presumptuous and impolitic (they were none of them of any academic importance). But in planning to do in their own way what clearly couldn't be done in the old, they were consciously appealing to the idea that it was more than ever the *raison d'être* of a university to be, amid the material pressures and dehumanizing complications of the modern world, a focus of humane consciousness ; a centre where, faced with the specializations and distractions in which human ends lose themselves, intelligence, bringing to bear a mature sense of values, should apply itself to the problems of civilization. They were, in fact, heroically bent on refuting the adjective ' academic.' And perhaps they will be pardoned if, on a proper occasion for formal retrospect, they seem to be making a lot of a very little; they will perhaps be for a moment indulged in the complacencies of the private perspective. They can at any rate say that *Scrutiny* has been run, by unpaid collaboration, from a base at a university, and has been run now for ten years.

Of course, that it should be in any narrow sense a university organ was contrary to the essence of the plan, which aimed (short of paying ' staff ' and contributors) at discharging the function of a metropolitan critical review. (And we don't think that *Scrutiny* will be found to have been notably more provincial than the metropolitan ' literary world '—but this is after all a very modest assertion). But without the base at a university, and the accompanying opportunities for recruitment, and for enlisting collaboration and support in other universities and in the academic world generally, *Scrutiny* couldn't have been kept going (apart from occasional gifts, amounting to a very small fraction of the expenses, it has been unsubsidized). These conditions of success have had their expression in the pages of *Scrutiny* in the attention given from time to time to question of education, especially to that of ' liberal education ' as it concerns the university[3]. But the essential thing on all counts has been the attempt to carry on, in the way described, the general function of criticism.

In his address last year to the Malvern Conference Mr. T. S. Eliot, referring (in flattering terms) to an article in *Scrutiny* by one of the editors, used the term ' humanist ' of those of us who have associated ourselves with what may be called the general editorial point of view (we consider it part of the function of *Scrutiny* to represent a diversity of views, as almost any quarter's issue will

[3]See note on inside back cover of this issue.

make pretty manifest). When Mr. Eliot says 'humanist' he intends, of course, a critical judgment; he is reporting an inadequacy in the nature of our preoccupation with the problems we discuss. Without going here into the intended force of Mr. Eliot's charge of incompleteness, it is perhaps worth repeating that we don't suppose ourselves to be doing anything more in *Scrutiny* than say: here are some things that need attending to; here is a kind of attention, and here a kind of approach, that is necessary. For instance, it seems to us important that the difference between a play by Mr. Eliot and a play by Miss Dorothy Sayers should be generally recognized, and we see no reason for believing that, without a preoccupation somewhere with the kind of approach represented by *Scrutiny*, there is likely to be anywhere an adequate insistence on such differences. The theoretical difficulty that Mr. Eliot raises[4] about the grounds of our preference for an ideal of civilization different from that dominant in Germany leaves us convinced that we have grounds enough to go upon.

Practical difficulties increase, and so, unhappily, do the occasions for apology: we are late again with this number, and, after the reavowals of large and high intention above, are the more embarrassingly conscious of other shortcomings that seem inseparable from carrying on under present conditions. But the word still is, we shall carry on while we can.

F.R.L.

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[4] 'In this article [the writer] observes: "the problem of producing the 'educated man'—the man of humane culture who is equipped to be intelligent and responsible about the problems of contemporary civilization—becomes that of realizing the Idea of a University in practical dispositions appropriate to the modern world." And he quotes a sentence by a Mr. Brooks Otis, an American writer [it is actually by the writer of the article]: "it is an urgently necessary work . . . to explore the means of bringing the various kinds of specialist knowledge and training into effective relation with informed general intelligence, humane culture, social conscience and political will." One agrees. But to such questions as: "Why should we want humane culture? Why is one conception of humane culture better than another? What is the sanction for your conception of social conscience or of political will as against that, for instance, now dominant in Germany?" I do not think that the humanist can give a satisfactory answer. Not every system of theology can lead us to an answer either.' *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society* (Longmans).

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'CYMBELINE'

FEW of Shakespeare's plays have elicited from the commentators and the critics verdicts so conflicting as has *Cymbeline*. Dr. Johnson's judgment was expressed with a ' curious felicity ' which he achieved, perhaps, in the same degree elsewhere only in his critical observations on *Lycidas*. His remarks on *Cymbeline* have attained a celebrity hardly excelled by the *Lycidas* passage, but, since, like all passages charged with a supreme irony, they have the power of delighting and purifying at once, they can hardly be quoted too often: ' This play,' writes the Sage, 'has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes . . . To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct . . . were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.'

Swinburne speaks with no less certainty (though his assurance is that of the enthusiast rather than of the oracle—judgment is delivered during the actual frenzy and not after all foam has been brushed by the hand of decorum away); but he speaks to very different effect: ' Here is depth enough with weight enough of tragic beauty and passion, terror and love and pity . . . subtlety enough of sweet and bitter truth . . beauty with delight enough and glory of life and grace of nature . . .'

Whether they speak of the ' construction of the plot ' or of the verse and general quality of the play, the voices of the critics are equally dissonant. On the whole the tendency is to regard the construction as careless and a little crude; but the author of *Shakespeare's Workmanship* finds the cry ' O mighty craftsman! ' wrung from his lips as he lays down the book. When they examine the verse, Professor Sir Edmund Chambers finds ' a gulf between the imperishable phrasing . . . of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the facile and disordered prettinesses which hang about the relaxed and structureless periods of the later plays '; while Hudson[1] wrote: ' [Shakespeare] uses the closest compression: his aim is to crowd the greatest possible wealth of mind into a given time . . . In the plays of his latest period we have the fiery force of intellect concentrating itself to the highest intensity which the language could be made to bear, and often exceeding even its utmost capacity ; while in turn the language in his use became a thing inspired . . .'

Yet if we do attend to the verifiable and examine the imagery, while we shall not solve the problem of what is likely to remain the most paradoxical and baffling of Shakespeare's plays, we may be able to focus more sharply the elements of the problems and perhaps

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[1] *Shakespeare: his Life, Art and Characters,* pp. 389-390: I owe the reference to Deighton's edition of *Cymbeline*.

secure a base for attempting a wider view and general estimate of the play.

The imagery of *Cymbeline* is of an unusual character. To begin with, it goes beyond the imagery of most, probably all, of the plays in its unrelenting pervasiveness; a single class of imagery is almost ubiquitous. Mr. Masefield, incidentally, might find some difficulty in squaring with this fact his suggestion, attractive on some grounds, that the discontinuity and incoherency of *Cymbeline* is due to its having been ' begun as a tragedy during the great mood of tragical creation, then laid aside unfinished, from some failure in the vision, or change in the creative mood, and brought to an end later in a new spirit.' In favour of, or at least compatible with, Mr. Masefield's suggestion are the exaggerated eulogies of the hero and heroine in the early scenes and their own secure self-confidence, which suggest, very much in Shakespeare's way, a challenge to the Fates and, so, ironically presage catastrophe. Moreover in III iv, where the faithful Pisanio takes Imogen to Milford in obedience to his master's murderous commands, we seem actually to watch the play modulating out of tragedy into comedy or romance. But, apart from the difficulty raised by the continuity of the imagery, this hypothesis is hardly reconcilable with the presence from the beginning of certain elements of romance, notably the theme of the ' thief-stol'n ' royal babes, the improbable villainy of the Queen, and the extravagancy of Cloten.

Yet it may still be true that the play *otherwise* represents several phases or strata of Shakespeare's experience: that it is the dramatization of a vision long present to his mind, a vision which dated, in a confused form, from the period of the great tragedies, and probably from much earlier, a vision which might equally well have been expressed in tragedy or in comedy, and perhaps better in lyric or allegorical epic, a vision which, while it never ' changed,' gradually clarified and simplified itself so as finally to elude articulation.

It is by way of this last suggestion that the immediate relevancy at this point of this apparent digression will appear in connection with the second general characteristic of the imagery: which is its abstractness. As is generally recognized, in the obviously great plays the total effect of the imagery is something ' not imagined—felt' (oddly, the phrase is from *Cymbeline*): the darkness in Macbeth, the disease in *Hamlet*, are an ' atmosphere ': intangible, they are apprehended by tact, ' felt.' In *Cymbeline* there is, generally speaking, no such concretion of idea, imagery, and situation ; the imagery strikes one, rather, as a removable oddity of expression, suggestive of a break-down of communication. Personally I am reminded—though I fear the comparison will appear incongruous—of the experience implied in ' The Ode ' of Wordsworth: the ' years that bring the philosophic mind,' while they deepen and purify the vision, rob the experience, not so much of its rich immediacy, as of the minimum degree of complexity and the particular sort of intensity that are the normal conditions of poetry; and at the same

time the vision itself becomes so rarefied, so concerned with beauty as a pure and 'abstract' essence, that it baffles even poetic expression. The Wordsworthian vision, when all is said, is communicated mainly through a prolonged gesticulation.

Finally, the imagery is rather trite—by now, hackneyed—and perhaps on that account it has been the less noticed[2]. To come now to the imagery itself: the pervading idea is that of worth, value. That which above all realizes this value, that which is pre-eminently (according to the most characteristic epithet) 'rare,' is a certain quality of spirit which appears variously as honour, fidelity, 'trueness,' and—for this is the play with 'the indecent theme'—chastity or purity. The familiar contrast of 'inner' and 'outer,' real and only apparent, worth occurs constantly and in a variety of forms. There is the contrast between the social status of Imogen and that of her husband: this is harped on a good deal, and Posthumus is frequently referred to, particularly by Cloten, as a 'beggar'; the general assumption is that the disparity of birth and position is irrelevant unless it reflects a difference of real worth. Then there is the contrast between mere physical beauty and 'honesty' (the 'handsome heart'). Intelligence, 'brains,' is considered as another sort of worth; and there is the familiar contrast of country and Court. The various sorts of worth form a scale; it is sometimes suggested that the lower forms may be counterfeit, may hide, or even be symptomatic of, an inner 'falseness': but the deeper implication is that all the forms have a fundamental affinity, partake, essentially, of the same quality and should, ideally, go together. It is Imogen's glory that she is rich in all the kinds, but especially in the 'jewel' of 'honesty': Iachimo exclaims on his first sight of her (I, vi):

> All of her that is out of door most rich!
> If she be furnish'd with a mind so rare,
> She is alone the Arabian bird.

And the courtier, arguing (I, i) that Posthumus is worthy of her, concludes

> I do not think
> So fair an outward and such stuff within
> Endows a man but he.

A passage which characteristically brings together several kinds, or levels, of falseness occurs in III, vi:

> Yes, no wonder,
> When rich ones scarce tell true: to lapse in fullness
> Is sorer than to lie for need; and falsehood
> Is worse in kings than beggars.—My dear lord!
> Thou art one of the false ones.

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[2]As the only two public libraries within reach, which are not completely frivolous, have been put out of action in the interests of the New Order, I have not had the advantage of learning what Dr. Spurgeon has to say about the imagery of *Cymbeline*.

Compare V, v, 8:

> Such noble fury in so poor a thing;
> Such precious deeds in one that promised nought
> But beggary and poor looks

where there is the further complication that ' the poor soldier that so richly fought, Whose rags shamed gilded arms ' is really the knight Posthumus.

This valuation-imagery appears in the frequently recurring metaphors of buying and selling, of estimating (including measuring and weighing), of equivalence or non-equivalence, of jewellery, of debts, contracts, and exchange. Further, the rich treasure and rare jewel is conceived as fragile and as the prey of thieves: it goes with, and is guarded by, a discriminating sensitiveness; the antagonists, the solvent forces, are conceived as cheap and ' common,' and go with coarse and calloused perceptions. *Cf.* the speech beginning ' Had I this cheek ' in I, vi; with this should probably be compared the lines in III, iv,

> Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
> Exposing it—but, O, the harder heart!
> Alack, no remedy!—to the greedy touch
> Of common-kissing Titan

where the meaning seems to be, in spite of the suggestions of editors, that when Imogen disguises herself as a boy, exchanges ' fear and niceness ' for a ' waggish courage ' and becomes sun-burnt, there is a danger that the loss of delicacy may go more than skin-deep. *Cf.* also III, iv, 93-95:

> Shalt hereafter find
> It is no act of common passage, but
> A strain of rareness.

' Common ' stands in obvious contrast with ' rare '; ' rare ' implies not so much that the rare quality has few instances, but that its achievement is desirable and arduous and that, attained, it is of great price; similarly ' common,' besides suggesting promiscuity and imperceptiveness, means something like ' easy.'

Some further illustration of the ' bargaining ' sort of imagery is necessary to establish my point; though, since it is very common, and since it is so lacking in special beauty or subtlety that analysis is neither necessary nor possible, much that is directly relevant must be omitted.

The play starts off with the ' dissembling ' of the flattering and hypocritical courtiers: ' our courtiers Still seem as does the King . . . all is outward sorrow . . . ' Posthumus is ' a poor but worthy gentleman '; and a few lines down the contrast between the ' faces ' and the ' hearts ' of the courtiers occurs again. Then the description of Posthumus quoted above, and the metaphor is immediately developed in the figure of an honest salesman displaying wares of solid value:

I do extend him, sir, within himself,
Crush him together rather than unfold
His measure duly.

The First Gentleman next proves the worth of Posthumus from Imogen's choice of him as a husband:

her own price
Proclaims how she esteem'd him and his virtue

—compare how in I, iv, Iachimo argues that Posthumus's marriage has caused him to be overrated. The same sort of imagery accompanies the exchange of jewellery 'As I my poor self did exchange for you . . .'—and underlines the revelation of conjugal infidelity just made by the Queen in similar terms—there far more unnatural:

I never do him wrong
But he does buy my injuries to be friends,
Pays dear for my offences.

This last quotation suggests, perhaps, that the whole complicated price-imagery is an elaborate extension of the familiar ambiguity of 'dear.' All these examples occur in the first 120 lines of the play, and there are more in the next 30 lines.

There is much, also, of this imagery in the Wager-scene (I, iv); and there, also, the symbolism of the jewellery is made explicit in 'Your ring may be stolen too: so your brace of unprizable estimations, the one is but frail and the other casual,' and in the phrase 'she your jewel, this your jewel.' Iachimo, of course, uses the stolen bracelet to prove that he has

pick'd the lock and ta'en
The treasure of her honour.

But the establishment of the symbolism further lends irony, probably, to Imogen's words just before Iachimo's 'attempting' of her—'Had I been thief-stol'n,/As my two brothers, happy!'; and it also allows Shakespeare to indulge in a little gentle moralizing (not, of course, at Imogen's expense) when he makes the unwitting Imogen bid her maid 'search for a jewel that too casually/Hath left my arm; it was thy master's.'

Imogen and Posthumus, when each thinks the other false, both cry out on the deceitfulness of 'good seeming': thus Posthumus's

Let there be no honour
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance (II, iv)

is answered by Imogen's speech (III, iv) beginning 'True honest men, being heard, like false Aeneas . . .'

Some interesting examples of this valuation imagery are to be found in Cloten's Wooing scene (II, iii), and the contrast between true and false nobility is underlined, rather heavily, in Posthumus's encounter with the British Lord (V, iii). The language of the repentance soliloquy in the following scenes depends on the tradi-

tional conceptions of expiation as the payment of a debt and of justice as consisting in an equivalence.

Another group of imagery centres in locks, bonds, and bolts[3]. ' Bond(s) ' is used in a great variety of senses, and is a focal point of the imagery. This group of imagery is connected with the main group through the idea that honour is a jewel which must be kept locked away; the connection is made explicitly in a passage already quoted.

Finally—and this leads up to the general interpretation of the play—a very high proportion of the words which occur only in this play seem to have been especially coined to express the idea of something uniquely excellent and ' passing fair ': such words are ' chaffless,' ' unparagoned ' (twice), ' outprized,' ' outsell ' (twice); and 'rare,' with its derivatives, occurs with a frequency even approached only in *The Winter's Tale*.

I should suggest, then, that the persistent ' value ' imagery indicates a preoccupation of the dramatist with the idea of an ideal perfection, an absolute value, and that this preoccupation was coincident with the attainment of a harmonized experience, an experience, however, not yet fully reorganized for the expression of the new vision in poetry. If it be objected that this is no preoccupation for a respectable dramatist, the answer perhaps is that this is true in so far as drama regularly involves a conflict, and the conflict in turn entails a certain hypostatization of evil; but the natural concomitant of the harmonization of experience, assuming it to be associated with a (Platonic) ' conversion,' is the rejection of dualism and the imaginative intuition of the identity of reality and value. (This identification, however, need not be held as a logical proposition; it may be assented to only on one ' plane ': and this is, here, not meaningless, since such a ' conversion ' might reasonably be expected to create a new plane of consciousness.)

But by an inevitable paradox the vision which, as an underlying assumption and as the source of an irritant, is at the root of much great poetry, can hardly itself be the theme of poetry. As an idea, it is found to be so general and abstract that it ' moves nothing '; as an ideal, it is so rich and concrete as to elude complete imaginative expression. Everything is related to it, because everything has value; but the relation is abstract; what is concrete is not the ground, but the subjects of the relation—things themselves; but they are not perceptibly ' like ' the ideal, do not reveal it. Yet certain favoured things—things that give the sense of extraordinary beauty and richness (mostly the least describable things)—are

[3]The frequent occurrence of the word ' lock ' in this play considerably strengthens the case, already very strong, for Dowden's conjecture of ' lock,' in the sense of wrestler's grip, for the pointless 'rock' of the Folios in V, v, 262; and *The Winter's Tale*, V, ii, 75, ' and so lock her in embracing as if she would pin him to her heart that she might no more be in danger of losing ' provides a good parallel.

analogues or symbols of it and evoke it—scent-laden breezes, and flowers, and setting suns (Yes, Wordsworth has listed some of them in *Lines Written above Tintern Abbey*). Hence the verse of *Cymbeline* is least alive in precisely those places where the idea finds clearest expression; the 'value' imagery is a clue to the experience which is at the heart of the play, but it does not communicate it; the experience is communicated, the rare quality evoked, in the genuine poetry of the play where the vision spontaneously crystallizes itself in concrete images which say nothing about value but awaken a sense of startling beauty: 'alone the Arabian bird,' 'in a great pool a swan's nest,' 'chaffless' (occurring just there), the flower poetry of the Dirge scene, and

> As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
> Not wagging his sweet head.

Another difficulty inseparable from the expression in poetry of such a vision is one of words (rather than of things): because it is a vision which all men have glimpsed, the words which might have been least inadequate to describe it have been staled by use. Consequently the poet is faced with the dilemma that if he uses ordinary language it will seem trite and dead, and probably priggish; while if he creates a new language and a new verse (as Hopkins did in his attempt to render concretely in verse the theology, which is a Christology, of St. Paul), he is likely to suffer the rate of the esoteric. So the poet finds himself, as it were, in a void.

A further difficulty besets the attempt at a *dramatic* rendering of such a vision. With the passing of the vision of evil, now seen as remote and alien instead of as urgent and present, conflict, which is the mainspring whence serious drama derives its energy, also disappears. The poet is left with a single principle of life, and cannot 'project' himself with full sympathy into antagonistic characters. And that may be the explanation of the inequalities, the incongruities, the discontinuity, the sense of different planes, the only spasmodic and flickering life, in *Cymbeline*. It must, I think, be recognized that *Cymbeline* is not an 'organic whole,' that it is not informed and quickened by an idea-emotion in all its parts. The 'evil' characters, in particular, do not receive full imaginative realization: there is something galvanic about their movements, something perfunctory, sometimes, or 'automatic,' about their speeches. Certain passages seem not 'apprehensive . . . forgetive,' but still-born, or, fossil-like, to belong to earlier strata of experience and to be produced now only by an acquired habit. Hence, also, the 'static' quality of the play and the sense of the unreality of the action, which is, in any case largely replaced by symbolism. Whereas in *The Winter's Tale* the positive possibilities of 'injurious Time,' its rôle as the condition of healing and of construction, are recognized, in *Cymbeline* time is simply ignored: there is no movement to a goal: the end is, on the contrary, felt to be immanent throughout.

This conclusion is, no doubt, startling; and the 'transcendental'

terminology, which I have been unable altogether to avoid, is unfortunate. Yet I know of only two other views that have any *prima facie* plausibility. One is that *Cymbeline* is simply a 'pretty' romance; but a single reading is sufficient to show this account to be at least inadequate. The other is the interesting theory propounded by Mr. Tinkler in a previous number of *Scrutiny*[4] and this seems to me, though more intelligent than the former, more, and more evidently, erroneous. Mr. Tinkler's view, if I may presume to attempt a summary of it, is that a painful tension, expressive of a profound dualism and conflict, pervades the more significant parts of the play. This tension is an index of, or accompanies, a ' taut critical irony.' Mr. Tinkler lays emphasis on a harshness in much of the verse, on certain images suggesting muscular tension, and ' an insistent feeling of brutal strain.' He detects further an ' air of savage farce,' and a subtly ' placed ' theatricality. The upshot is that ' throughout there is no " positive " which is not modified by the intense irony '; there is an (intended) ' air of impossibility ' about Imogen (' she is so extraordinarily chaste,' ' her impossible chastity '), conveyed by ' the continual inflation ' in the verse, which ' brings the ironic inflection.' Thus although ' the whole play does seem in fact a gradual probing and sifting of experience to create a precise definition of the ' ideal vision ' and to reconcile it with actual living experience ' (may I remark, without impertinence, that this is excellent?), yet the vision and the crudity of the ' work-a-day world ' are represented, fundamentally, as irreconcilable, and at the end ' no ideals have been left standing. Imogen is a " commodity,"

> A shop of all the qualities that man
> Loves woman for.'

But this last metaphor, to begin my criticism there, refers (V, v 166), not to Imogen, as Mr. Tinkler implies, but to ' our loves of Italy '; and in any case its significance is easily understood in the context of the ' value ' imagery. To interpret it otherwise is to be guilty of the fallacy of confusing value and price; and Shakespeare had already shown his explicit awareness of this distinction in ' You are mistaken: the one may be sold or given, if there were wealth enough for the purchase, or merit for the gift; the other is not a thing for sale, and only the gift of the gods ' (I, iv). But price naturally stands for value by metaphor.

The attitude towards Imogen is, of course, the crucial question. I can detect no ' ironic overtones ' in her portraiture. That a passage is sincere in a quite unironical way, that it is ' conducting ' the central idea—emotion, is, naturally, not demonstrable; the sincerity is recognizable only by catching a ring in the verse, a ring

[4] *cf. Cymbeline* by F. C. Tinkler, *Scrutiny*, June, 1938: while I have done my best to represent Mr. Tinkler's views accurately, their exact nature and full force cannot be appreciated otherwise than by studying his subtle exposition.

as unmistakable as the new vibrancy that enters a voice under the necessity of emotion. I can only record the personal impression that the application of such a test to *Cymbeline* reveals no 'critical irony' in the attitude towards Imogen. Speaking from memory, and so at a remove, I should quote, in support of this contention, ' chaffless,' ' alone the Arabian bird,' and the famous ' With fairest flowers . . .' speech, which, though ostensibly referring to Imogen's appearance, is really a description of her spiritual quality: Guiderius's blunt comment, ' Prithee, have done . . .', otherwise explained by Mr. Tinkler, only gives it strength and stability, ' preserves ' it. But the decisive impression is the total impression left by the play.

Mr. Tinkler quotes from two speeches spoken by Imogen alone with her appointed executioner just after she has read the letter in which her husband denounces her as a ' strumpet,' and comments on the ' bitterness ' revealed, contrasting it with the tone of the speeches of Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*. But, obviously, Imogen's situation is very different from Perdita's: she ' corresponds ' *both* to Hermione and to Perdita (who is not, to her knowledge, wronged). Imogen for the greater part of the play is separated from her husband, and during much of it is thought by him unfaithful. It is Hermione who is the victim in *The Winter's Tale*; Perdita suffers only a temporary setback in her ' romance ': why should one whose story in outline, is that of an unusually beautiful and charming young lady who, after being brought up as a shepherd's daughter, finds herself to be engaged to a prince and the heiress to two kingdoms, be ' bitter '? There seems, then, to be no reason for regarding the element of harshness in *Cymbeline* to be, in any sinister way, symptomatic.

Again, Mr. Tinkler (rather surprisingly) compares Imogen with Cleopatra and (not unnaturally) finds a contrast: ' Cleopatra is created *through* the details of common life (although?) the vision transcends them, whereas Imogen is conceived almost *in spite of* them.' But, after all, Cleopatra is a very different sort of heroine from Imogen, and represents, on any theory, a very different sort of ideal. Yet something like 'tension ' *is* felt through much of *Cymbeline;* but I should attribute this sense of tension, or frustration, to a failure of consistently successful communication; it exists not in the original experience, but only (and by accident, not by design) in the result. Moreover, the failure of the ideal completely to subdue the ' homely ' is not intended—not a satirical comment—but is inevitable for reasons already suggested; and in any case the familiar does not appear as thwarting, or even as hostile to, the spiritual energy, but only (whether owing to the curse recorded in *Genesis* iii, or for some other reason) as failing to reflect it. And hence, presumably, the necessity of the ' pastoral ' scenes; there the protest of the princes, from the start, against idyllic seclusion is important, as is also their final rejection of 'idyll' in the name of ' action and adventure '; this, perhaps, safeguards the positive values of the idealized world against destruction when

the setting itself crumbles and vanishes before the breath of reality and the invasion by war. Imogen passes easily from the one world to the other and back again; she ' belongs,' effortlessly, to both.

Again, Mr. Tinkler finds an extravagance and theatricality, indicative of irony in the conception, in the characterization of Posthumus; he writes, for example, that Posthumus, where he admits his guilt (presumably in the violent and rather hysterical speech of V, v 210 f.), ' rants and struts and visualizes himself, quite conceitedly, as a monster '; but are we to understand that this ' self-dramatization ' extends also to the closing cry of the speech, ' O Imogen, Imogen, Imogen! ' And is ' savage farce ' really an apt description of the next moment, when Imogen (still disguised as a page), hearing her name on her husband's lips, rushes forward to reveal herself, only to be flung by him to the ground? This speech, after all, is the sequel to the sad self-knowledge and contrition revealed in the V, i soliloquy[5], and is surely, the natural sequel in the new situation where Posthumus discovers the innocence of his wife whom he thinks to have been murdered at his command. (As for the ' theatricality ' of Iachimo's speech in I, vi, Iachimo *is* ' acting ' there.)

In general, where Mr. Tinkler finds an almost serpentine subtlety I find only the naïveté of the dove. Where he sees, or thinks he sees, irony, I find only detachment: not a detachment calculated to secure ' emotional distance ' in order to ' protect the creative sensibility from experience too painful,' but a spontaneous detachment indicative of emotional distance already secured by tranquillity. This tranquillity, however, is not the tranquillity of relaxation, but the *concentrated* tranquillity of ' perfect activity '; but the activity is not also ' unimpeded '; in its expression it energizes freely only in certain areas—in symbols of the ideal, in Posthumus's repentance, where there is a new birth of the ideal, in passages expressing qualities directly opposed to the ideal in the particular terms in which it is conceived, and fairly continuously in Imogen, who is the incarnation of the ideal in verse.

A. A. STEPHENSON, S.J.

[5]The context of Mr. Tinkler's remarks perhaps indicates that it is really to this scene that they refer; but, if so, they are even less appropriate as a description of the slowed tempo, the subdued, reflective melancholy, of this soliloquy.

# THE CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE'S LATE PLAYS

## A CAVEAT.

WHEN Fr. Stephenson criticizes F. C. Tinkler's account of *Cymbeline* I find myself in agreement. I was never convinced by that account, stimulating and profitable as I found some of the accompanying observation and suggestion[1]. Nor am I convinced by Fr. Stephenson's. Of its very nature, it doesn't invite one so challengingly to point out where it is wrong, but it seems to me quite as unconvincing. ' Unconvincing ' is the word I want to stress: the conclusion, the theory, doesn't emerge with any inevitability from the observations that are offered as containing its grounds.

The observed recurrence of valuation-imagery is interesting. But even when I re-read the play with an eye adverted by Fr. Stephenson I can't see that imagery as having anything like the relative prominence or importance he assigns it (and his general remarks about the imagery of the play seem to me questionable in the extreme). The theory that he develops in ' transcendental ' terminology (as he puts it) would demand, to make it anything other than an excursion of fancy, a great deal more support than he points to, and the significance he finds in the play is at least as much imposed (it seems to me) as Tinkler's ' critical irony ' and ' savage farce.' The attributed significance, of course, is deduced, not from the valuation-imagery alone, but from this as related to another set of observed characteristics:

> ' the inequalities, the incongruities, the discontinuity, the sense of different planes, the only spasmodic and flickering life in *Cymbeline*. It must, I think, be recognized that *Cymbeline* is not an " organic whole," that it is not informed and quickened by an idea-emotion in all its parts.'

The stress laid on these characteristics of the play seems to me much more indisputably justified than that laid on the valuation-imagery. So much so, in fact, that the question arises: Why didn't both Fr. Stephenson and Tinkler (whose argument also derives from observation of these characteristics) rest in the judgment that the play ' is not an " organic whole," that it is not informed and quickened by an idea-emotion in all its parts '? Why must they set out to show that it is, nevertheless, to be paradoxically explained

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[1]It is sad to have to record that F. C. Tinkler, a young man of high promise (he was expected to achieve distinction in anthropology), died in hospital at Madras last December.

in terms of a pressure of ' significance '—significance, according to Fr. Stephenson, of a kind that cannot be conveyed?

That two such intelligent critics, bent on conclusions so different, should countenance one another in this kind of proceeding suggests some reflections on the difficulties and temptations of Shakespeare criticism—and especially of criticism of the late plays—at the present time. We have left Bradley fairly behind. We know that poetic drama is something more than drama in verse, and that consideration of the drama cannot be separated from consideration of the poetry. We are aware of subtle varieties of possibility under the head of convention, and we know we must keep a vigilant eye open for the development of theme by imagery and symbolism, and for the bearing of all these on the way we are to take character, action and plot. Shakespeare's methods are so subtle, flexible and varied that we must be on our guard against approaching with inappropriate preconceptions as to what we have in front of us By assuming that the organization is of a given kind we may incapacitate ourselves for seeing what it actually is, and so miss, or misread, the significance. What a following-through of F. C. Tinkler's and Fr. Stephenson's accounts will, I think, bring home to most readers is that we may err by insisting on finding a ' significance ' that we assume to be necessarily there.

I have put the portentous word in inverted commas in this last use of it, in order not to suggest a severity of judgment that is not intended. The play contains a great variety of life and interest, and if we talk of ' inequalities ' and ' incongruities ' it should not be to suggest inanity or nullity: out of the interplay of contrasting themes and modes we have an effect as (to fall back on the usefully corrective analogy) of an odd and distinctive music. But the organization is not a matter of a strict and delicate subservience to a commanding significance, which penetrates the whole, informing and ordering everything—imagery, rhythm, symbolism, character, episode, plot—from a deep centre: *Cymbeline* is not a great work of art of the order of *The Winter's Tale*.

*The Winter's Tale* presents itself as the comparison with which to make the point in that it belongs with *Cymbeline* to the late group of plays—plays that clearly have important affinities, though my purpose here is to insist on the differences. In academic tradition *The Winter's Tale* is one of the ' romantic ' plays; the adjective implying, among other things, a certain fairy-tale licence of spirit, theme and development—an indulgence, in relation to reality, of some of the less responsible promptings of imagination and fancy. Thus we have the sudden, unheralded storm of jealousy in Leontes, the part played by the oracle, the casting-out and preservation of the babe, the sixteen-year gap in the action, the pastoral scene (regarded as a pretty piece of poetical by-play) and, finally, the return to life after sixteen years' latency of Galatea-Hermione, in the reconciliation-tableau. But all this has in the concrete fulness of Shakespeare's poetry an utterly different effect from what is suggested by the enumeration. *The Winter's Tale*, as D. A. Traversi

shows so well in his *Approach to Shakespeare*[2], is a supreme instance of Shakespeare's poetic complexity—of the impossibility, if one is to speak with any relevance to the play, of considering character, episode, theme, and plot in abstraction from the local effects, so inexhaustibly subtle in their interplay, of the poetry and from the larger symbolic effects to which these give life.

Properly taken, the play is not romantically licentious, or loose in organization, or indulgent in a fairy-tale way to human fondness. What looked like romantic fairy-tale characteristics turn out to be the conditions of a profundity and generality of theme. If we approach expecting every Shakespearean drama to be of the same kind as *Othello* we criticize Leontes' frenzy of jealousy as disconcertingly sudden and unprepared. But if our preconceptions don't prevent our being adverted by imagery, rhythm, and the developing hints of symbolism—by the subtle devices of the poetry and the very absence of 'psychology'—we quickly see that what we have in front of us is nothing in the nature of a novel dramatically transcribed. The relations between character, speech and the main themes of the drama are not such as to invite a psychologizing approach; the treatment of life is too generalizing (we may say, if we hasten to add ' and intensifying '); so large a part of the function of the words spoken by the characters is so plainly something other than to ' create ' the speakers or to advance an action that we can profitably consider in terms of the interacting of individuals. The detail of Shakespeare's processes this is not the place for discussing; anyone who wants hints for the analysis will find all that can be asked in D. A. Traversi's book. It is enough here to remind the reader of the way in which the personal drama is made to move upon a complexity of larger rhythms—birth, maturity, death, birth (*Thou mettest with things dying, I with things new-born*); Spring, Summer, Winter, Spring

> (*Sir, the year growing ancient,*
> *Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth*
> *Of trembling winter* . . .)

—so that the pastoral scene is something very much other than a charming superfluity. The power and subtlety of the organization—and this is a striking instance of Shakespeare's ability to transmute for serious ends what might have seemed irremediably romantic effects—are equal to absorbing into the profoundly symbolic significance of the whole even the *coup de théâtre* with which Pauline justifies her sixteen years of double-living and funereal exhortation.

As Fr. Stephenson points out, there is no such organization in *Cymbeline*. The romantic theme remains merely romantic. The reunions, resurrections and reconciliations of the close belong to the order of imagination in which 'they all lived happily ever after.'[3]

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[2]Reviewed in *Scrutiny* for March, 1939.

Cloten and the Queen are the wicked characters, stepmother and son, of the fairy tale: they don't strike us as the expression of an adult intuition of evil. Posthumus's jealousy, on the other hand (if I may supplement Fr. Stephenson's observation: 'the "evil" characters, in particular, do not receive full imaginative realization'), is real enough in its nastiness, but has no significance in relation to any radical theme, or total effect, of the play. And here there is opportunity for a brief aside in illustration of the variety of Shakespeare's dramatic modes. Jealousy is a theme common to *The Winter's Tale, Othello* and *Cymbeline*. In *The Winter's Tale* there is no psychological interest; we don't ask (so long as we are concerning ourselves with Shakespeare): What elements in Leontes' make-up, working in what way, explain this storm? The question is irrelevant to the mode of the play. *Othello,* on the other hand, it would not be misleading to describe as a character-study. The explosive elements have been generated between the very specifically characterized Othello and his situation, and Iago merely touches them off. Posthumus's case actually answers to the conventional account of Othello's: the noble hero, by nature far from jealous, is worked on and betrayed by devilish Italian cunning—Iachimo is, quite simply, the efficient cause that Iago, in the sentimentalized misreading of *Othello,* is seen as being. Posthumus suffers remorse for his murderous revulsion, but we are not to consider him degraded by his jealousy, or seriously blameable. Simply, he is a victim. He falls in with a villain who, out of pure malice, deceives him about Imogen, and, after strange vicissitudes, fairy-tale fortune brings the lovers together again to enjoy a life of happiness. Shakespeare that is, has taken over a romantic convention and has done little to give it anything other than a romantic significance[4].

Why then should two such intelligent critics as those in question not settle down in the obvious judgment that the play challenges? I have already suggested that the answer should be sought in terms

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[3] *cf.*

'A ce moment parut doña Luz, l'air timide.
(Dès qu'il l'aperçut, le général la prit par la main).

"Ma nièce, lui-dit-il, le visage joyeux, tu peux aimer sans crainte Cœur-Loyal, il est vraiment mon fils. Dieu a permis que je le retrouve au moment où j'avais renoncé à jamais au bonheur!"

La jeune fille poussa un cri de joie et abandonna sa main à Rafael, qui tomba à ses pieds. En même temps le général s'approcha de sa femme et dans la réunion qui suivit on oublia tous les malheurs du passé en songeant à l'avenir qui promettait tant de joie.'

*Les Trappeurs de L'Arkansas,* Gustave Aimard.

[4] In *Pericles* he took over a romantic play, and the three acts that are clearly his are remarkable for the potency of the transmuting 'significance.'

of a reaction against what may be called the Bradley-Archer[5] approach to Shakespeare. In the case of *Cymbeline* the assumption that a profound intended significance must be discovered in explanation of the peculiarities of the play is fostered by the presence of varied and impressive evidence of the Shakespearean genius. I questioned above Fr. Stephenson's disparaging general reflections upon the imagery of *Cymbeline;* but I explain these by some inadequate conception of 'imagery,' since it is clear that he is not insensitive to what is strong in the play.

Strength could be adduced in a wealth of illustration. I myself have long carried mental note of a number of passages from *Cymbeline* that seemed to me memorable instances of Shakespeare's imagery and versification. Two in particular I will mention. One is Posthumus's description of the battle, V iii, lines 14 to 51. It is a remarkable piece of vigorous dramatic felicity. The precisely right tone, a blend of breathless excitement, the professional soldier's dryness, and contempt (towards the Lord addressed), is perfectly got. There are some fine examples of Shakespearean compression and ellipsis; and here, surely, is strength in imagery:

> and now our cowards,
> Like fragments in hard voyages, became
> The life of the need: having found the back-door open
> Of the unguarded hearts, heavens, how they wound!

In 'like fragments in hard voyages' and the 'back-door' we have, in imagery, the business-like and intense matter-of-factness, at once contemptuous and, in its ironical dryness, expressive both of professional habit and of controlled excitement, that gives the speech its highly specific and dramatically appropriate tone. The other passage is Posthumus's prison speech in the next scene (V iv 3-29), so different in tone and movement:

> Most welcome, bondage! for thou art a way,
> I think, to liberty: yet am I better
> Than one that's sick of the gout; since he had rather
> Groan so in perpetuity than be cured
> By the sure physician, death, who is the key
> To unbar these locks.

This doesn't belong to 'romantic comedy,' nor does the dialogue with the gaoler at the end of the scene. And here, and in the many vigorously realized passages, we have the excuse for the attempt, in spite of 'the inequalities, the incongruities, the discontinuity, the sense of different planes,' to vindicate the play (for that, paradoxically, is Fr. Stephenson's aim as well as Tinkler's) in terms of a profound significance. But surely there should be no difficulty in

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[5]See *The Old Drama and the New* by William Archer. T. S Eliot comments interestingly on the book in the essay called 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' (*Selected Essays*).

recognizing that, wrestling with a job undertaken in the course of his exigent profession, Shakespeare might, while failing to find in his material a unifying significance such as might organize it into a profound work of art, still show from place to place, when prompted and incited congenially, his characteristic realizing genius?

*Cymbeline,* then, is not like *The Winter's Tale* a masterpiece. *The Tempest* is by more general agreement a masterpiece than *The Winter's Tale,* but it is a very different kind of thing (to complete briefly the hint of comparison I threw out above). Lytton Strachey, in his essay on *Shakespeare's Final Period* (see *Books and Characters*), gives us an opening: ' There can be no doubt that the peculiar characteristics which distinguish *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* from the dramas of Shakespeare's prime are present here in still greater degree. In *The Tempest,* unreality has reached its apotheosis.' Lytton Strachey's ' unreality,' strongly derogatory in intention, has to be understood, of course, in relation to the Bradley-Archer assumptions of his approach. Actually, it seems to me that *The Tempest* differs from *The Winter's Tale* in being much closer to the novelist's ' reality.' The ' unreality,' instead of penetrating and transmuting everything as in *The Winter's Tale,* is in *The Tempest* confined to Prospero's imagery and its agents. Prospero himself, the Neapolitan and Milanese nobility and gentry, Stephano and Trinculo, the ship's crew—all these belong as much to the ' reality ' of the realistic novelist as the play of *Othello* does. Prospero manages the wreck, lands the parties and directs their footsteps about the island to the final convergence, but they strike us, in their behaviour and conversation, as people of the ordinary everyday world. The courtiers are Elizabethan toffs, and Gonzalo's attempt to distract the king and raise the tone of the conversation with a piece of advanced thought from Montaigne is all in keeping. Even Caliban (though sired by the devil on a witch) leads the modern commentator, quite appropriately, to discuss Shakespeare's interest in the world of new discovery and in the impact of civilization on the native.

The ' unreality ' functions in Ariel and in the power (as it were a daydream actualized) that enables Prospero to stage the scene of repentance and restitution. But the nature of this power as a licence of imagination stands proclaimed in the essential symbolism of the play; and not only does Prospero finally renounce magic, break his staff and drown his book, but the day-dream has never been allowed to falsify human and moral realities. That Alonso should, without the assistance of magic, suffer pangs of conscience is not in the least incredible; on the other hand, we note that the sinister pair, Sebastian and Antonio, remain what they were. They may be fairly set over against Ferdinand and Miranda, and they represent a potent element in that world to which the lovers are returning, and in which, unprotected by magic, they are to spend their lives.

O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

—that is both unironical and ironical. Shakespeare's power to present acceptably and movingly the unironical vision (for us given in Miranda and Ferdinand) goes with his power to contemplate the irony at the same time.

Rightly, then, is *The Tempest* accounted a masterpiece; but I am not sure that it deserves the relative valuation it commonly enjoys. The judgment that *The Winter's Tale* is a masterpiece would not, I think, in general be as readily concurred in; and it is true that *The Tempest* has nothing in it to trouble in the same way the reader who finds difficulty in arriving at an unqualified acceptance of the statue business as part of a total unromantic response. But the perfection (or something like it) of *The Tempest* is achieved within limits much narrower than those of *The Winter's Tale;* and the achievement by which, in *The Tempest,* the time-gap of *The Winter's Tale* is eliminated ought not to be allowed to count improperly in the comparative valuation. With the absence of the time-gap goes also an absence of that depth and richness of significance given, in *The Winter's Tale,* by the concrete presence of time in its rhythmic processes, and by the association of human growth, decay and rebirth with the vital rhythms of nature at large. The range, the depth, the effect that I have described as both generalizing and intensifying, for which *The Winter's Tale* is remarkable are missing in *The Tempest.* Not that while reading *The Tempest* we are at all inclined to judge that this inspired poetry and this consummate art reveal any falling-off in the poet's creative vigour; yet we may perhaps associate the mood expressed in Prospero's farewell to *his* art and in the ' insubstantial pageant ' speech (the mood in which Shakespeare can in the symbolic working of the drama itself so consciously separate his art from the life it arranges and presents—life that is ' such stuff as dreams are made on ')—perhaps we may associate this mood with an absence of that effect as of the sap rising from the root which *The Winter's Tale* gives us. No doubt it might as truly be said of Florizel and Perdita as it has been of Ferdinand and Miranda, that they are lovers seen by one who is himself beyond the age of love, but Florizel and Perdita are not merely two individual lovers; they are organic elements in the poetry and symbolism of the pastoral scene, and the pastoral scene is an organic part of the whole play.

F. R. Leavis.

# LANGUAGE AND FUNCTION IN AMERICAN MUSIC

*And we love Art for Art's sake,*
*It's smart for Art's sake,*
*To part for Art's sake,*
*With your heart for Art's sake,*
*And your mind for Art's sake,*
*Be blind for Art's sake,*
*And deaf for Art's sake,*
*And dumb for Art's sake,*
*Until for Art's sake*
*They kill for Art's sake*
*All the Art for Art's sake.*

MARC BLITZSTEIN, *' The Cradle Will Rock.'*

OF late the B.B.C., by way of its *Radio Times* apologist Mr. Ralph Hill, has been singing a loudish song about the amount of American music which, in its zeal for Anglo-American unity, it has included in its programmes, so perhaps it should be dogmatically stated that, with the exception of one or two works of Aaron Copland, none of the compositions it has performed since, at least, the outbreak of war has any more right to be considered as an expression of the ' American spirit ' or of musical culture in the States to-day than have the lucubrations of ' the egregious Macdowell, that Ella Wheeler Wilcox of music,' as Kaikosru Sorabji once called him. The works we have heard of John Alden Carpenter, Deems Taylor, Ernest Schelling, Samuel Barber and the like may have been written down in America in the twentieth century; but they were born and bred in the drawing-rooms of nineteenth-century Europe, and might well have stayed there.

Until we are familiar with a representative selection of the large-scale works of Copland, Charles Ives, Roy Harris, Roger Sessions, Marc Blitzstein, Walter Piston, Bernard Wagenaar, Quincy Porter and, among the younger men, David Diamond and Donald Fuller, we cannot claim to have any notion of what is happening in musical America: and we ought to have a notion, not because the music even approaches greatness, but because the difficulties of the contem-

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[1]*Quiet City,* for strings, trumpet, and English horn, by Aaron Copland (orchestral score. Boosey and Hawkes, New York and London).
*The Cradle Will Rock,* a play in music by Marc Blizstein: selected numbers in piano score (Chappell and Co., New York).

porary American composer[2] manifest perhaps the most extreme form of the difficulties of the modern artist in general, so that those composers who seriously tackle them are likely to have an intimate bearing on the evolution of musical language in the future. In America two aspects of what is really one problem interact in a very much closer fashion than on the whole they do in Europe, and for convenience we may call these aspects ' language ' and ' function.' I want to offer a few comments on them and their interaction by way of the work of two composers whose interests would seem to centre around the first and second aspect respectively. Aaron Copland is interested primarily in language—the creation of the indigenous American speech; Marc Blitzstein is interested primarily in the function which this language should serve : and each is dependent on the other because without the language the function cannot operate and without the clearly defined function the language may never be born.

Let us start with the language; and let us admit that to define how this ' American spirit ' that differentiates significant American music from European precisely manifests itself is an extremely difficult undertaking. We can see that it must be connected in some way with the difficulties arising out of America's vast size and the relative poverty and ' unrootedness ' of any of its regional cultures (I am not referring here to Latin America which is a different matter altogether) : and confining our attention to Aaron Copland who is accepted as perhaps the most complete and distinguished musical personality America has produced, I think we can see in a general way that his music is influenced by America's vastness (the more so because of the lack of local interest) in so far as the spiritual climate of his best work creates a feeling of crude vitality, enormous airiness and immensity of space which is alien to the music of Europe. If, however, we wish to give any coherent idea of the *nature* of this difference—this significant airiness and vitality—we must proceed to describe—as adequately as we can manage without the use of musical type—the technical characteristics of which the above apparently subjective impressions are after all only metaphors. We can do this the more hopefully because a score of one of Copland's most mature and representative works—*Quiet City* for strings, trumpet and English horn—has just been published by Boosey and Hawkes. The score is not expensive and beautifully printed, and those readers who find these comments of any interest should find *Quiet City* well worth their money.

One can perhaps approach the idiom negatively by saying that, although in some of its lines erratic and irregular, it is about as far

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[2] I have written negatively of these difficulties in an article on the music of Charles Ives; here I am hoping to make a few positive comments—a distinction the nature of which can perhaps be indicated by saying that the art of Ives is essentially incomplete, whereas Copland is probably the first complete and self-subsistent American composer.

from the suave unending flux of Delius's rhapsodic lines as one could possibly imagine. It generates with extreme slowness through the monotonous repetition and eventual modification of brief figures which tend to the angular, the jerky and spasmodic. The method of the early piano Variations, the theme of which contained only four operative notes, was really the same, though here Copland restricted himself to percussive development and to a self-conscious machine-steeliness of major sevenths and minor ninths, whereas now he seeks for the true American idiom which, like all indigenous dialects, will preserve, however contortedly, contact with the voice. Here the agile leaps of the line, in particular its ascending fourths and minor sevenths (which are built of two fourths super-imposed), produce an effect at once aspiring and curiously hollow, while the texture too is gaunt and linear, with very little harmonic ' filling-out,' and that entirely of a diatonic or modally altered (flattened seventh or sixth, etc.) and non-chromatic order.

But it is the rhythms that principally give character to the fourth-founded, occasionally pentatonic-tending lines, and it is in its rhythmic conception that the music differs so signally from European music. In Copland's most representative work rhythm seems to function on two separate planes simultaneously; there is the rhythm of the individual spasmodic line which may be, as in the solo parts of *Quiet City,* elaborately syncopated and sophistical, combined with modal alterations in the tonality: there is also the rhythmic basis of the whole composition's harmonic structure—the pattern made out of the phrases—and this may seem to our ears excessively slow. In this extreme rhythmic mobility within apparent immobility Copland's music is perhaps more eastern than European, and it is in this connection that some primitive musics of Latin America may well influence musical developments in the U.S.A. Of course Copland's music preserves a diatonic basis, for American music came willy-nilly from a European stock even though it is now, in the process of grafting, learning to grow its own roots, after a hundred years' wilting: but I come increasingly to think that the future of American music—as perhaps of American civilization—does depend on at least a partial relinquishment of the time-obsession such as Copland's best music provides and its own vastness should maybe naturally entail. However this may be, the superficially nervous, active bustle of the individual lines, and their pioneering buoyant fourths, seem continually dammed, checked by the ponderous slowness of the whole rhythmic design that imposes on them, as it builds itself up, the most agonizing repetitions, will not let them fly but keeps them flutteringly pinioned; so that the ultimate effect of the music is immensely energetic, yet curiously depressed and nervously exhausted. I believe this is true even of *An Outdoor Overture* and *El Salon Mexico* (the latter I am inclined to think on repeated hearings somewhat more interesting than its deliberate tawdriness might lead one to expect); it is certainly the secret of the distinctive flavour, the real Americanism, of the *Music for Radio* (1937), of *Billy the Kid* (1940), of the music for *Our Town* (1940), or of any

of the works written since he relinquished his early experiments in the jazz idiom in favour of a search for a more fundamental American rhythm. And it is true of *Quiet City* which, though ostensibly a serene piece with many of its phrases suave if brief, owes its distinction to a kind of subterranean nervous tension which, if partially resolved at the big climax, in the closing section once more assumes control.

It should by now be clear that the spaciousness and open-airiness of Copland's music has nothing of Chesterton-Belloc heartiness about it but has in its vastness and lack (as it were) of human habitation, a quality that is always wistful and at times deeply melancholy. I think it is more than an accident that Copland, who started, in the rhythmic experiments of such works as the piano Concerto, as a sophisticate of the Big City, should in his mature work have come to express the loneliness (' ten thousand around me and I was alone ') that lies back of all big cities and in American ones and in Copland's music in particular merges into the immense stillness and timelessness of the prairie, a feeling as remote from sentimentality as it is from ' le far-west ' of one-time romanticizing Parisians.

None of Copland's works is profound and all illustrate the perplexities consequent upon the lack of a tradition: but his later compositions speak with a new voice that is genuinely American and a great improvement on the self-conscious Americanisms of the jazz-cum-steel-girders phase which Copland exploited during the nineteen-twenties. His music has become clearer and more stable, and as his idiom has matured he has become more and more interested in those problems of functional music on which the future of American music, more directly than that of our own, increasingly depends: or, what is even more significant, the native American language, when eventually Copland discovers it, proves to be one so congenial to, as almost to imply, functional use.

The simplest instance of this lies in the fact that the texture of Copland's music—its characteristic hollowness, sparseness, and the linear, unatmospheric quality of its orchestration as exemplified in *Quiet City* with its sharp opposition between solo voices and strings —is by nature extraordinarily suitable to the microphone and to mechanistic treatment generally. Copland's music for radio, whatever its value *qua* music, is certainly fresh and a typically contemporary mode of experience: it is also a very intelligent and ingenious extension from certain acoustical premisses. Here we cannot say that the language created the function or the function the language, but only that they were born twins. Come to think of it, it is natural enough for the indigenous language of a machine civilization to be functional; but it takes a creative artist to make sense of this or any doctrine.

It is in the writing of music for films that Copland's most important functional work has been done; and again, remembering the uniquely intelligent pioneer work which Erik Satie did in this field, we can see immediately how easily Copland's integrally evolved

idiom lends itself to cinematic application. The effect of Satie's film music, with its clean linear orchestration (' sans sauce '), depended not on the continuous architectural development of musical themes, which the inevitably intermittent quality of the musical accompaniment and the necessity for avoiding over-obtrusiveness anyway prohibited: rather it depended on the building up of a structural mosaic or sound-pattern of brief lyrical phrases accompanied by a more or less mechanical percussion—a sound pattern which discreetly underlined but did not realistically express the visual images of the screen. Obviously the natural idiom of Copland's personal language parallels this, the only uncinematic aspect of it being that the tension involved in its dual conception of rhythm might tend to render it too obstrusive. Significantly therefore, in the music for *Our Town* and for the closing scenes of *Of Mice and Men*, the rhythms of the individual lines also slow down, so that the tension dissipates and the music, generating its clear patterns of rising fourths, is among the most serenely beautiful and poignant that Copland has given us. It is significant too that in these instances the music accompanies visual images of immense airiness and vast space.

The bigger part of Copland's film music is of a 'documentary ' order, but even in stories of human drama such as *Of Mice and Men* his method still depends on the building up of short linear motives into sound patterns, with the rhythm of the phrase itself and the larger rhythm of the pattern which the phrases make; always it depends on the transference of the visual impact into inherently musical terms. The scene in which Curly attacks the giant simpleton is typical. The blows rained upon him are stylized as a series of sharp staccato brass chords, harmonically unrelated, dancing at random over the score, and these finally coalesce into an enormous grinding discord when Lennie, awakened, crushes Curly's hand. There is no attempt at literal illustration, but a dramatic situation is translated into musical terms; the chaos of unrestrained violence is not represented by audible realism but by an expression in true musical language of the idea of chaos[3], with its ultimate resolution, and this may take its place in the pattern of the whole. Similarly the comically orchestrated music to the food-guzzling scene is not a realistic recital of the uncouth noises emitted in certain circumstances by the human animal—the human animal can after all do it so much more effectively than bassoon or piccolo ; rather is it a stylization *in musical terms* of the conflicting emotions—boredom, exasperation and what-else—revolving during that episode in the girl's mind, and the final effect of the music is not amusing at all but nostalgically sad. The musical stylization arises from the dra-

[3]Compare Satie's musical translation of this idea in the Chaos movement of *Mercure*. Copland's is, on the whole, harmonic, whereas Satie's, combining two previously used themes of widely disparate emotional temper, is essentially melodic: but in either case the translation is inherently in terms of music.

matic effect and yet is perfectly adequate to itself; the function and the art are inseparable, each creating the other.

This food-guzzling scene involves a threefold activity which is perhaps the basic problem in all composition for the films—an attempt to correlate in a specified scene (1) noise background (aural realism); (2) what one might call the ' psychology ' of the scene (the underlying emotions of the characters); and (3) the relation of the scene to the pattern of the whole: all dramatic functions synthesized in the language of music. The music to *Our Town* indicates how some of the larger accepted musical structures may be not inappropriate to this translation. Passacaglia and variation may for instance be apposite to extended scenes embodying, say, the idea of endurance; and the brilliant research work of that very distinguished composer Hans Eisler under a Rockefeller Foundation Grant at the New School for Social Research has demonstrated how the repetitive rondo form, sonata form and even twelve-tone counterpoint may be susceptible of cinematic treatment, much as Berg reconciled the strictest classical formalism with the romantic melodrama of atonal opera, in order to gain both musical *and* dramatic concentration. Of course intelligence, and dramatic adequacy combined with musical self-sufficiency, won't make good film music without the creative impulse of the good composer: but the serious composer will be more likely to bend his energies to these and kindred problems if he sees that they are worth tackling and may be rewarding. Certainly the more one looks into all Copland's mature music the more it seems to relate back or to imply a function in its very idiosyncratic language. The ballet suite *Billy the Kid* is perfectly satisfying as concert music yet all its rhythms seem to spring directly from bodily movement just as its tersely sardonic orchestration is impregnated with the gay nostalgia of theatrical effect. As it matures Copland's music tells us ever more clearly that music, if it is good music, abhors a vacuum.

Copland evolves an indigenous musical language which, being evolved, reveals functional implications latent in it from the start: Marc Blitzstein, on the other hand, begins with the function and then discovers the language through it. For Blitzstein, music has a job to do, is propaganda: though the commerical idiom is a social acquisition that has been used for perverted ends he sees no reason why it shouldn't be used for moral ones or, if it has been used for perverted ends because it is the product of a perverted society, then it's up to the artists to invest it with the power to hit back. This power turns out to be music: function is the dominating motive but music is the function's salvation. Copland's music when it is most serene seems to be so through shutting out or at least transcending the human scene: Blitzstein, through his music, is going to make humanity more aware of its social obligations. In Copland's work the purity of the musical language merges into the function: in Blitzstein's the literary, human and dramatic function merges into the music. Therefore his work is centred in the theatre.

It would seem advisable, as a preliminary, to enquire briefly into what functions music, in the theatre, might be expected to serve. Blitzstein himself has written on this subject in a very lively and intelligent manner, and it is characteristic of his attitude that he regards all music as (among other things) theatre in the sense that through melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm, etc. it unfolds a human drama: music does not become music until it is performed, ' with the functions of composer, performer and listener in acute and interlocking play.' What we call theatre music is merely music which works in conjunction with other elements—words, setting, costume, action, plot—to make a complete projection: all these help to make the music understood, and Blitzstein wishes to be very clear about his meaning.

First the words. Here, if you want your work to be a humanizing force, for everyone who can listen, not just an élite, you must sheer off heroism and the ' literary.' Be natural, but don't so excessively savour the commonplace that it Steinishly becomes not human at all. Beware of the danger of sentimentalizing a sophisticated mood, or vice versa ; and above all remember, in writing words for a tune, that there is no difference in the quality of a theatre song as compared with a concert song. (' I have heard that the former, being "plugged," need only be "pluggable," while the latter can take its time, make its points more musically; in other words, don't be too good a composer, and you may write a successful theatre song. It doesn't make sense to me. The good theatre songs of the past seem to have lasted, the poor concert songs seem to have died; and Time and Tarnish go their own sweet way, plucking off the cheaper products without regard to category '). Blitzstein's texts are wonderfully competent at using the idiom of American speech in a way that lends itself to musical transliteration. They borrow the idiom of the Broadway lyric and the Cole Porterish verbal dexterity, but are of course critical and even parodistic in intent. They are not self-subsistent; but direct and trenchant and witty or pathetic enough to allow the music to elevate them into art that moves as well as diverts.

Then as to music and action. Here music may be background, designed to suggest an appropriate atmosphere, thereby underlying the dramatic motives: it may be foreground, directly furthering the action through the employment on the stage of song, march or dance that directly influences the characters: it may itself unfold the plot through its acuteness and concentration, as in *The Freedom of the Press* from the *Cradle*: it may play a part analogous to ' Shakespearean ' symbolism, connecting up various dramatic incidents, revealing latent significances, often with ironic intent, as in *The Nickel under the Foot*. There are many other devices: ' speech passing to song, words underpinned by music passing into action, with the music carrying on; the device of silence when an action or phrase wants sudden and startling relief '; and in general ' you can say in a song what would ordinarily take pages of dialogue; and you can expand and deepen, too, by means of music. Music in the

theatre is a powerful, an almost immorally potent weapon. It will do things you would never dream of; it will be fantastically perfect for one scene; it can louse up another scene to an extent which is unbelievable. There is only one rule I know; follow your theatre instinct. You discover you've got it very much in the same way you first discovered you were a composer. You may be wrong on both counts; but your inner conviction is all you've got.'

But of course this so adaptable and powerful medium is meaningless apart from its function; it is there to put something across. Most people must feel sufficiently discouraged with capitalist civilization to admit that some kind of castigation might not come amiss. It has often been said that the satirist to-day has many things to satirize but no coherent scale of beliefs to act as a norm of reference and to give his satire validity. I believe Blitzstein has what he believes to be the adequate system and the adequate solution; but significantly it does not enter into his art. In his art he gives No for an answer except for the positive affirmation of life which his music is. The ' belief ' is the music ; this is why I said that music is the function's salvation. The significance of Blitzstein consists in his being an artist.

Of Blitzstein's two plays in music[4] (as he calls them) the earlier, *The Cradle will Rock*, is much less important musically than the later *No for an Answer*, but it is supremely competent and brilliantly written. The story, a passionate one of graft and drudgery, is told through action, accompanied dialogue and song in the judicious mingle indicated by the published Drugstore Scene, with its patterned ironic effects. Of the pattern of the whole of this story of Joe Worker who gets gypped (through the agency of the villainous capitalist Mister Mister), its deliberately crude black-and-white, its hokum of a blood-red dawn at the end, one cannot speak without seeing the work performed: but it is the incidental pathos and satire that matter, and we can see the elements of them, if not the complete picture, in the individual songs.

Blitzstein aims at pruning and purging a diseased society on the way to investing it with new life; and he sets about this task by pruning and purging (in order to re-create) a diseased musical idiom—intelligibly enough, because it is essential that he speaks a language that will be easily understood. The idiom of the *Cradle* seems mainly fairly close to commercial music: some of the parody numbers (such as *Honolulu* or *The Rich*) guy their originals by reducing their clichés *ad absurdum*; others, such as *Croon Spoon*, parody the real thing only by their ironic text and by being musically so infinitely more accomplished. (*Croon Spoon*, save perhaps for the modulation to F sharp minor in the middle section of the chorus and save for the fact that it is by any account such

[4]He is at present at work on a third dramatic work *The New York Opera*: and has recently completed the music for a full-length documentary film, *Native Land*.

a splendid tune, shows no obvious break with the accepted convention).

More representative of Blitzstein's method, however, are the songs containing tragic implications, such as *The Cradle Will Rock, Joe Worker,* and (more cynical) *The Nickel under the Foot.* The idiom remains diatonic and the structure the simple ternary one of the commercial number, but the line acquires a surprisingly flexibility as the tonal transitions become increasingly enharmonic. In *The Cradle Will Rock* (an explicitly agitated song) the tonality hovers between a kind of Phrygian E minor and B flat major in the verse, and in the chorus between E flat minor and E major with chromatic alterations, ending with successive fortissimo triads of B, A, D, and A flat major, accompanying a line rising from D sharp up the scale of E. Certain rhythmic extensions are also implicit in these tonal ambiguities, so that the line is given an extraordinary alertness that seems at the same time both brusque and jaunty. Inevitably since the tonal concept is modified the harmonies depart further from the commercial conventions and become, though simple and direct in themselves, in their juxtapositions sometimes harsh and uncompromising. *Joe Worker,* although (except at the climax of the chorus) less unconventional, has such a fine passionate tune and is so powerfully constructed within its narrow frame that it gives something like nobility to the sincere indignation of the words.

*The Nickel under the Foot* and *The Freedom of the Press* are two satirical, as opposed to parodistic, songs, the former gently cynical but finely lyrical, the latter sardonic in quick mechanical symmetrical rhythms, and tonally very free. This is not very close to the commercial number: still further removed is the *Gus and Sadie Love Song,* a tender slowly lilting waltz melody containing some very subtle enharmonic changes which invest the line with a curious questioning, poised wistfulness, and which also entail some disturbing juxtapositions of chords in themselves perfectly simple (Blitzstein is particularly fond of the E minor-C minor triad collocation). Blitzstein's music had started from a function and a commercial technique ; in all these songs and especially in *Gus and Sadie* he has arrived at a personal language that is completely convincing and self-subsistent, and therefore, of course, representatively American. It is quite distinct from Copland's, whose lines, rotating so much round a fixed point, make relatively little use of modulation while being less firmly diatonic. Nor, of course, has it any of Copland's dual rhythmic sense, nor in its ' American ' agility and vitality, any of Copland's subterranean loneliness and inhumanity. It is urban music for an urbanized community, sharp satire for an age in need of satirizing, sardonic and even bitter sometimes, sometimes tender with a sentiment as scrupulously clean as its accomplished technique, but on the whole buoyant and optimistic even when most indignant.

However effective as satire and topical entertainment with a sting in its tail, however encouraging as a sign that composers haven't entirely abandoned a society that would seem to have no

use for them, the *Cradle* is too small a work to reveal Blitzstein's significance as a creative artist. In *No for an Answer* words, music and action (they are all Blitzstein's work) are conceived on a much larger scale, on a similar theme (a group of unemployed waiters victimized by big business), and this time the satirical implications are less to the fore than the tragic ones ; the play ends with no party utopia but with the implicit affirmation that to this kind of corruption and to this social ill-health the only answer is the courage and honesty and passion that have gone to make this play and music.

It follows that the whole conception is much more homogeneous. There are very few set song numbers, though the torch song and *Penny Candy* are certainly the most distinguished songs that have been written in this manner, even by Blitzstein. Generally, the commercial convention has been banished except for a faint hint which serves, as it were, as a point of reference, and the music acquires its compelling power and momentum through the very reticence with which it underlines the action.

The vocal lines, still diatonic but more elliptical both tonally and rhythmically than in the *Cradle*, have a beautifully expressive lyrical simplicity which comes from their preserving, in their tonal fluidity, contact with the natural inflexions of the human speaking voice, while the harmonies discard the ' commercial ' clichés and rely mainly on diatonic triads in linearly and enharmonically dictated relations, often juxtaposed with brusque dissonance. Throughout the solo vocal parts the texture remains that of speech which merges into song, and some of the most musically beautiful passages of the work are those in which the orchestra reticently comments on—indeed recreates but with of course the opposite of Wagnerian violence—dialogue that is almost completely spoken. (Perhaps the loveliest passage in Blitzstein's music, impregnated with his characteristic pity and dramatically brilliantly effective, is the spoken and crooned duet in act 1 scene 8 between Joe and Francie).

A particularly significant characteristic of the orchestral parts is the tendency to rely on one figure monotonously repeated throughout—the texture of the duet mentioned above achieves exquisite limpidity and concentration out of two complementary figures of flowing and dotted quavers, in mainly consonant relations. In quicker movements this device produces an impersonal effect that, though so different in emotional climate, parallels the method of Erik Satie, and thereby provides a link also with the functional music of Copland. This is especially noticeable in the big choruses where the brusque symmetry (still deriving from the popular chorus) and the occasional rhythmic and tonal distortions of the vocal lines, the hollowness of the polyphony, the relentless patterns of the accompanying figures, often in irregular groupings, the wilfully banal harmonies mingled at times with ruthless combinations of major and minor triads and unresolved appogiaturas, all create cumulatively an impression of immense, even frightening, power.

Perhaps the music transcends humanity here because of the universality of its indignation: certainly now that this fierce anger has come to complement Blitzstein's pity, he achieves his most idiosyncratically impersonal music. The supreme expression of the function is also the consummation of the purely musical language, and in the savage impersonality of Blitzstein's choruses, no less than in the relative timelessness and placelessness of Copland's later work, the authentic American language proves to be as remote from anything normally implied in an aggressive musical nationalism as could well be imagined. If the future of music is indeed to be comparatively international, such are the paths that the evolution of musical language might legitimately take.

This solo-chorus, personal-impersonal dichotomy can be clearly seen in scene 5 of act 2 when Paul sings an agonised recitative-aria (' the sky is black and blackenin' ') of a strange wavering chromaticism, growing freely from the natural rhythm of the words, followed by a tonally ambiguous slow waltz; and is then harshly interrupted by the chorus singing in symmetrical patterns ' escape by flight, escape by sleep ' over a fiercely rigid instrumental ostinato of brackish unrelated diatonic triads. Still clearer is it in the patterned recitative—a kind of sublimated oration punctuated by irregularly stabbing, blunt dissonances—of the final scene (' Make the heart be stone '). The line here arises so intimately out of intoned speech and the harmonies are so ancillary to it that one might be tempted to say that the music is merely playing scullery-maid to drama, were it not that the overwhelming impressiveness of the music demonstrates that if such is the case a little honest labour is clearly good for her. I would say anyway that the cumulative effect of *No for an Answer* establishes Blitzstein, with Copland, among the very few contemporary American composers to make a lasting contribution to cultural history, and they both show what the importance of the function to the language and the language to the function in American music might potentially be.

I do not want to be misunderstood: I do not claim that either Blitzstein or Copland has written any music that could conceivably be called great; but I do claim that their work is important—of greater importance than that of many composers who would seem both more pretentious and more profound—because they have done something to restore good music to a position of dignity and power in the everyday life of human kind. This is of immense significance for music's future. Maybe in the States it was more urgent than in Europe: but let us not delude ourselves into thinking that our ' traditions ' will save us if we make no effort to save ourselves—to make the music we make (as well as that of the past which we passively listen to) a part of our active life. There is all the difference in the world between this aim and propaganda; I don't mean that anyone in his senses wouldn't agree with Blitzstein's propaganda or at least the negative part of it which is all that enters into his art: but that it is the affirmation of music's bearing on life

that matters, not the creed worn or outworn. To listen to the *Cradle* is both emotionally and intellectually bracing, clearing the air of false values and offering some simple values of its own which provide a point of approach to legitimate ' art ' music; by the time one has responded sensitively to *No for an Answer* one will have reached a point at which even the most ' difficult ' of contemporary masterpieces will seem not entirely gibberish, besides having experienced a work big and spiritually enlivening in itself. As for Copland's film music, I know that to the average Hollywood movie music of such distinction would be inappropriate: but *Our Town* and *Of Mice and Men* prove that reasonably intelligent and commercially successful films may benefit from good music, and even if the public didn't like or (which is more probable) didn't notice the music, at least in time it could hardly fail to open up a new realm of musical experience to people who might have accepted it long since had its existence ever been vitally brought home to them.

So let there be as much of such music as possible: and let leftish minded people all over this county as well as in the States get together and perform Blitzstein's music which without performance is meaningless. It's the only vital step towards the improvement of ' public taste,' musically speaking, that I can think of, and though it is not easy to perform—even the *Cradle* contains surprises for those nurtured on Gilbert and Sullivan—it is certainly not insuperably difficult. It is written with the most musicianly clarity and like any good thing is worth trouble and pains. Unfortunately the score of *No for an Answer* has not yet been published and I have had to write these comments referring to an (incomplete) blue print of the manuscript which the composer sent me. I believe, however, that it is soon to be published piecemeal; and there are recorded excerpts from both works, which were produced at the Mercury Theatre, New York, by Orson Welles.

Moreover, it isn't merely ' the improvement of public taste ' that's involved: since we hear so much nowadays about how much better everything's going to be ' after the war,' it's perhaps worth while saying that to listen sensitively to *No for an Answer* will do more to tell us what the Rights of Man *are* than no end of chatter about them and kindred reconstructive topics. In conclusion, *pour encourager les autres,* a quotation may perhaps be permitted from a letter of Blitzstein to the present writer:

> ' This is a time when all art, and especially that kind of art which has sociological import, is meeting a pretty crucial test; the challenge for the future is immense. I am not even faintly discouraged; on the contrary I feel confirmed, confident. It is my hope, of course, that some of this attitude of optimism (I hope not thoughtless optimism) has got into my music, and will fill any stage or hall where my music is played or my works performed.'—March 25, 1941.

Now that is a ' pep-talk ' that is worth pondering.

W. H. MELLERS.

# DICKENS, DRAMA AND TRADITION

## I.

AS many different points of view have been taken of the genius of the author of *Martin Chuzzlewit* as Mr. Pecksniff required from his pupils in making elevations of Salisbury Cathedral. The only procedure, at this date, for anyone wishing to add to the lengthy list of Dickensian criticism is to select those questions upon which something, perhaps, remains to be said, and deal with each separately. But the very confusion which would attend any attempt to view Dickens's labours as a whole has an attraction, and a certain value, provided it be put forward merely as an introduction to detailed study of individual points.

For the confusion reigns not only among his critics, but among his writings. It is not only that, almost as with Shakespeare, the critics have attributed to their author their own opinions, and from his ' extremely varied published works ' have presented to us a typical Victorian, a typical anti-Victorian, a Marxist, a Royalist and so on. The conclusion to be drawn here is clear enough: that Dickens should be considered as a novelist, first to last, and judged by the standards of his art.

But this verdict introduces the problem rather than settles it. The confused idea of Dickens one would carry away after reading the opinions of (to name a few) Lewes, Taine, Gissing, Chesterton, Mr. Santayana, Mr. O'Faoláin, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Orwell, this confusion is nothing beside the heterogeneous mass of good, bad and indifferent writing which the average Dickens novel itself presents.

Take, for instance, the novel we mentioned to begin with. If *Martin Chuzzlewit* be not universally thought Dickens's finest work (Chesterton preferred *Bleak House* and Mr. Kingsmill, if I remember rightly, plumped for *Pickwick*) yet it has never been denied a place in the front rank. Gissing said that in it ' every quality of Dickens is seen at its best,' and that, apparently, was Dickens's own opinion when be began to write—he had ' never had so much confidence in his powers.' Yet we could hardly find a better example than *Chuzzlewit* for our contention. There can be few pieces of literature where the good and the bad jostle each other so closely. That the good predominates overwhelmingly is, of course, true, and an ' expurgated ' edition of the novel (inspired by motives rather different from Thomas Bowdler's) would not make it many pages shorter. But we have to admit that Dickens, by all evidence, thought it everywhere good; he ' laughed and cried as he wrote.' Though we still laugh, we find it difficult to share the tears.

The good is very good indeed. Whether Pecksniff be a ' human being ' or only the embodiment of a vice, we are confronted with the

perfection of this presentation of hypocrisy. It is brilliant at a distance, from one's casual recollection, but the idea of the writer's comic genius becomes a certainty when we look at the detail, the actual language, with which this figure is given to us. One of the strangest paradoxes in the artistry of Dickens is that this most verbose of novelists, who gloried in his longwindedness and never used one word where ten would do, was also a master of the pithy, illuminating phrase. ' With a phrase,' says Eliot, ' He can make a character as real as flesh and blood—" What a Life Young Bailey's was! " ' He can also give us a couple of lines that say as much about the ruling vice of Mr. Pecksniff as the rest of the hypocrite's adventures put together. I am not thinking of the often-admired exhortation to his daughter Charity (' When I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr. Anthony Chuzzlewit, who has done me an injustice ') but of his conversation with Mrs. Lupin at the Blue Dragon, when he pulls off his gloves to warm his hands before the fire—warming them, says Dickens, ' *as benevolently as if they were somebody else's, not his,*' and his back ' as if it were a widow's back, or an orphan's back, or an enemy's back, or a back that any less excellent man would have suffered to be cold.'

Throughout, it is the detail which is so masterly. The ideas we hold in recollection of Mrs. Gamp, Young Bailey, Mr. Jefferson Brick, Mrs. Todgers, are clearly enough defined, but we have to turn to the actual text, the language in which these characters are presented to us and with which they speak, to get the proper value of their creation. It is always the *language* of Dickens that is so important; his genius was essentially dramatic. We may remember that Mrs. Gamp was a fat old woman who liked the bottle to be left on the mantlepiece so that she might put her lips to it when she was ' so dispoged,' but we are less likely to retain in our memory, as part of the effect she has had upon us, the epitaph (say) on her late husband—' the wooden leg gone likeways home to its account, which in its constancy of walking into wine-vaults, and never coming out again till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker.' We may remember Mrs. Todgers well enough as a person, while forgetting that, when she embraced the Miss Pecksniffs, there was ' affection beaming in one eye and calculation shining out of the other.'

The deliberate and necessary distortion of language in which these characters move and speak fits their deliberately exaggerated forms; they are all several sizes larger than life, but the distortion is to scale. The popular idea of Dickens's characters, that they are, in a sense different from Eliot's, so *real,* so closely drawn from life, is (as Seán O'Faoláin and others have pointed out) the opposite of the truth. Micawber may have been based on Dickens's father, but the difference between them is the difference between Sairey Gamp and any garrulous old woman in one's own experience, between Young Bailey (' an abstract of all the stable-knowledge of the time ') and the precocious youngster Dickens relates meeting in America,

between the Flora of *Little Dorrit* and the woman Dickens had once wished to marry. Between, if you like, Falstaff and Sir John Oldcastle.

As for the bad writing in *Chuzzlewit,* the vulgar pathetic touches are there, of course, as in almost everything he wrote, and may here perhaps be summed up in the phrase ' Blessings on thy simple heart, Tom Pinch! ' The laboured archness of the courtship between Ruth Pinch and John Westlock (' Oh, foolish, panting, timid little heart, why did she feign to be unconscious of his coming? ') is barely worth deriding; is, in fact, on Dickens's very lowest level;—yet a level I think possibly he might not have descended to so often had not a certain number of sheets to have been delivered regularly to the printer. But the apology is a lame one, and we have to admit the absolute lack of any critical discrimination[1] in a writer who could produce such things. A better apology, as I hope to show, can be found in the vulgarity of the age that accepted them. For the moment the point to be made is simply the extraordinary difference in intelligence between the mind which produced the best parts of Gamp and Pecksniff, and the American interlude, and the mind which produced the worst parts of Thomas Pinch, the mind being the same man's, writing the same book.

The difference cannot be explained simply by saying that the comic parts of *Chuzzlewit* are good and the ' serious ' or ' sentimental ' parts bad, because that is an over-simplifying of the case. Pecksniff is a comic character, certainly, but Hypocrisy is not a comic thing; it would be stupidly sophisticated of us to deny that Dickens's avowed object in writing the novel was achieved. ' The notion of taking Pecksniff for a type of character,' Forster tells us, ' Was really the origin of the book, the design being to show, more or less by every person introduced, the number and variety of humours and vices that have their root in selfishness.' With the accumulation of Pecksniff, the Miss Pecksniffs, Anthony and Jonas Chuzzlewit, old and young Martin, the object may be said to have been attained, and the unearthly goodness of Tom Pinch and Mark Tapley may presumably be explained by the need for a contrast, these two personifying unselfishness as clearly as the rest its opposite. The *unreality* of all the characters does not matter. What is significant is that whereas the distorted form given to comic characters like Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp and Young Bailey becomes an artistic virtue, becomes great comedy, the distorted form given to the serious characters appears to act the other way, so that wicked people like Jonas are merely melodramatic and good people like the Pinches just vessels for sentimentality.

Why this should be so is not an easy question to answer, if

[1] ' The good opinion which he had of himself was never shaken by adverse criticism; and the criticism on the other side, by which it was exalted, came from the enumeration of the copies sold ' (Trollope).

indeed it is possible to answer it satisfactorily at all. Why should the comic distortion succeed and the serious distortion fail? A possible explanation lies in the connection of Dickens with the stage. I think that possibly the serious characters should not be there at all, that the vices of Jonas should have been laughed at equally with Pecksniff's, that the whole thing should have been a Comedy of Humours like the play of Ben Jonson's Dickens admired so much.[2] But for the moment we are concerned with this confusion of styles in *Chuzzlewit,* this discrepancy in taste. The novel is, of course, simply an exceptionally good example of what is to be found in nearly all Dickens's work. There is a high comic seriousness in the early pages of *Oliver Twist* and a low ' serious ' sentimentality later on. *Bleak House,* praised by Chesterton and undoubtedly one of Dickens's best, gives us the excellent comedy of Chadband and Guppy and the Snagsbys, the skilful melodrama of Chesney Wold, the satire on Chancery, the impressive delineation of London; but there is also the sillier side of the Dedlock story and the pathetic-figure of the consumptive crossing-sweeper, who might have been presented with success had not so many tears fallen on the writer's manuscript (' Jo, is it thou ? '). The satire on the *nouveau riche* in *Our Mutual Friend* is offset by the incredible figures of Lizzie Hexham and Eugene Wrayburn. The comic characters of *Dombey,* again, are only scarce plums in the stodgy suet of the sentimental theme.

One might cite nearly all the novels to the same purpose. Those least marred by sentimentality and melodrama are, I suppose, *Pickwick, Barnaby Rudge, Hard Times, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations;* but that does not necessarily mean they are the best. The humour of *Pickwick* is of an entirely different kind from that of *Chuzzlewit* and (in spite of the famous Trial Scene) the kind is lower; it is less subtle, in many places almost good enough for *Punch,* and one monologue by Mrs. Gamp is worth a whole chapter of Wellerisms. The virtue of *Pickwick* is that it maintains a level, is consistent, its farce only slightly spoilt by sentimentality; Mr. Pickwick is a ' lovable ' character, but Dickens does not shed blessings on his simple heart, as on Tom Pinch's; the book seems in comparatively good taste against the avalanche of sentiment that immediately followed it: *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop.*

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[2]In a recent article in the *New Statesman,* Mr. V. S. Pritchett attributes part of the common misunderstanding of Dickens's method to the fact that he is no longer read side by side with his original illustrations: ' Cruikshank . . . upsets all the weary pieties of realism which lie between us and a comprehension of Dickens.' This applies equally well to ' Phiz,' Cruikshanks's successor, who illustrated *Martin Chuzzlewit* and who certainly brought out strongly enough the essentially unrealistic conception of Pecksniff when he made the hypocrite, struck down by his ' venerable friend ' at last, upset on to the floor two books— *Le Tartuffe* and *Paradise Lost.*

If those novels of Dickens where his taste for sentiment and melodrama is least indulged were also those where his comic genius is at its height, we should have no difficulty in saying which are his finest works. But Mrs. Gamp adorns *Chuzzlewit,* Micawber rubs shoulders with Steerforth and Little Em'ly, Oliver leaves the workhouse not for the world but for the nineteenth-century-stage version of it. Therefore Dickens has no masterpiece (as George Eliot her *Middlemarch*), no sustained piece of writing where his virtues are unaccompanied by his faults. He is the one great novelist whom, even at his best, it is necessary occasionally to skip. But, though he probably wrote nothing that as a whole can compare with *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones,* yet there are passages in *Oliver Twist,* in *Martin Chuzzlewit,* in *Little Dorrit,* which make even the fine comic genius of Fielding appear slight.

II.

Dickens's interest in the theatre, and the influence of the theatre upon himself and upon his writings, have formed an important part of every biography, from John Forster's to Mr. Kingsmill's. The childhood recitations, the acting and stage-managing in amateur productions after he had become famous as novelist, the public readings of his works which were really a kind of acting (he added ' stage-directions ' to the copies he read from) —these are the most obvious points. But also connected with the question are his love of applause, his self-dramatization (shown in the persistency with which he kept up the legend of the Inimitable Boz, in the un-English flamboyancy of his dress, even in the famous flourish under his signature), and the effect of the theatre upon his actual writing. It is this last point we wish to discuss here.

He lived, of course, at a time when the drama in England had sunk to its lowest level. Edmund Kean, ' the last of the great actors,' died in 1833, and the very fact that this date seems important is significant, for it is not usually by its actors that one judges a period's drama. But, after Sheridan, who died in 1816, there is no distinguished name in playwriting till the close of the century, when Dickens had given his final reading of the Murder of Nancy and left unexplained the Mystery of Edwin Drood. It was a period of stagnation in the drama, which had been declining gradually since the middle of the previous century, perhaps ever since Fielding, ' driven out of the trade of Aristophanes ' (as Shaw puts it) ' took to that of Cervantes.' Drury Lane, after Kean, gave itself over to grand spectacles, with real water on the stage, etc. The remnants of tragedy descended into melodrama and the dregs of comedy dwindled into farce. There was no important dramatist on the Continent (I take it that Goethe's influence did not affect the stage) to give an impetus to the English theatre as Molière had done in the seventeenth century and Ibsen was to do later on—even had the notorious insularity of the Victorian character, deplored by Matthew Arnold, been susceptible to such an influence. So that melodrama, becoming more and more crude and appealing to less

and less intelligent audiences, shared the stage with farce and with burlesque. The popularity of burlesque is not surprising in a period that saw the birth of *Punch,* and it would appear to have lasted many years, for we find that even Samuel Butler, a novelist supposedly out of tune with his time, makes the regenerate Ernest Pontifex ' laugh heartily ' at a skit on *Macbeth* and cry ' What nonsense Shakespeare is, after this!'

If we accept the proposition that the dramatic genius which might have gone into playwriting, had the theatre been in a more healthy state, spent itself instead, like Fielding's, on the novel, then we need to know why, on the face of it, Dickens would appear likely to have been so *bad* a dramatist. Not, of course, by the evidence of his amateur dramatic efforts, in which he was excelled by his friend Wilkie Collins, nor by the stage versions of his novels presented later on by Beerbohm Tree and others, but by the evidence of the novels themselves. How unlikely it seems, on the face of it, that the creator of Little Nell, Florence Dombey, Lizzie Hexham, Sidney Carton, to name a few of his less credible figures, would have been able to produce any drama that was not of the most melodramatic sort. And this is not to ignore Mr. Eliot's reminder that ' you cannot define Drama and Melodrama so that they shall be reciprocally exclusive; great drama has something melodramatic in it, and the best melodrama partakes of the greatness of drama.' For it would not, apparently, have been the ' best melodrama.'

But might it not have been the ' best comedy '? Might not the creator of Mrs. Gamp, Pecksniff, Flora Finching, Jefferson Brick, Sapsea, Chadband, Buzfuz, Micawber, have produced comedy nearer in kind to *The Alchemist* than to the usual Victorian farce? This seems as likely as the contention that he could not, by any evidence, have produced a serious play that would not have been grossly sentimental and melodramatic. So that we come back to the conundrum propounded by *Chuzzlewit*—why are the comic parts so good and the serious parts so bad? It is not enough, obviously, to say that he had a genius for comic writing, and that, with a flourishing theatre, this genius would probably have taken a dramatic instead of a prose fictional form. The question goes deeper: why should a writer so concerned with Virtue, Morality, Justice, etc. so seldom succeed in being serious; or, to put it more fairly, succeed usually on such a low level?

I believe we were not so far from a possible explanation when we mentioned just now the name of Fielding. Robert Walpole drove Fielding from the theatre by the institution of the censorship. The novels he subsequently wrote owed, as the title-page of *Joseph Andrews* too generously acknowledged, a large debt to Cervantes. But they must also have been influenced by his own dramatic experience; indeed, the influence of the stage upon his novels has even been urged as a point of criticism against them. So that we have a link, if a very slight one, to connect the novels of Fielding with the course of English stage comedy, from his own plays back (via Congreve, Wycherley, Dryden and Massinger) to those of Ben

Jonson. It is not, obviously, a point to be stressed; it is sufficient to note that a connection of some sort must have existed. That the connection extends to Dickens we know, of course, from his early reading of Fielding mentioned in *Copperfield* and in Forster's *Life*, quite apart from the stylistic evidence of the novels.[3]

So that the writer of comedy, actually in fiction but conceivably in drama, is connected, however slightly, with the masters of the art. There is no such connection discoverable on the ' serious side.' What connects the Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy with the Victorian melodrama is merely the long and tedious degeneration between the two, represented (at various stations down the line) by Shirley, Otway, Lee, Addison, Lillo, Knowles, etc. The dissociation, surely, is almost complete, even though the ' best melodrama ' may bear some slight resemblance to *Macbeth*. For his comedy, Dickens had the influence of Sterne, Smollett, Fielding and Defoe, and through Fielding (however slender the connection) the influence of the English stage right back to Ben Jonson and Shakespeare. For his ' tragedy,' he had the *William Tell* of Sheridan Knowles, the death of Le Fevre in *Tristram Shandy*, and an appreciation of Shakespeare spoilt by the degenerate opinion of the times (*Punch*, burlesque, ' the celebrated dramatic poet buried at Stratford,' etc.) —spoilt also by his own ' knowingness ' about the stage[4].

He was a writer very much influenced by his surroundings, by the taste and sentiment of his time; this would be expected of one whose most obvious distinction was, as Santayana puts it, ' a vast sympathetic participation in the daily life of mankind,' who had the largest and most enthusiastic public of any writer before or (saving Best-Sellers) since. He could be critical of his time and its manner when the question was one of social reform; he wrote *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*. He could oppose the money-grabbing and the pretentiousness that were the darker side of ' our commercial greatness ''; he wrote *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*. He was not patient of the law's delay; he wrote *Bleak House*. But the things that did not arouse either his righteous indignation or his sense of the ridiculous slipped through his guard unobserved. The sentimentality and vulgarity of the age he accepted with open arms; he was an important part, himself, of that sentimentality and vulgarity; his love of the theatre became a liability as well as an asset when it

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[3] *e.g.*, the opening of Ch. VI of *Chuzzlewit*: ' It was morning; and the beautiful Aurora, of whom so much hath been written, said and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose . . .'' The influence of Fielding upon Dickens is not, of course, simply a matter of conscious and exaggerated imitation like this.

[4] *e.g.*, his account of an early visit to the theatre, where ' the witches in *Macbeth* bore an awful resemblance to the thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland . . . and the good king Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else.''

took over *en masse* the conventions of its debased melodrama.

It remains to be seen wherein lie the assets and the liabilities. As *Chuzzlewit* reminded us, it is the language of Dickens which is always so significant, and so it is the actual speech of the characters, rather than any question of dramatic ' improbabilities ' or ' coincidence ' in the plot, that matters most when we wish to consider the influence, good or bad, of the stage.

Perhaps it is as well to get the bad over at once. When Ralph Nickleby dies, crying to the church bell:—' Lie on, with your iron tongue! Ring merily for births that make expectants writhe, and for marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already! Call men to prayers who are goodly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming-in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to an end. No bell or book for me! Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there, to infect the air! '—when the villain of *Nickleby* dies like this, we are certainly (to borrow the phraseology of *Elizabethan Essays*) ' in the presence of a vicious rhetoric ' and a character ' seeing himself in a dramatic light,' and we are bound to be reminded of the dying speeches of some Elizabethan villains (' Tongue, curse thy fill, and die! '); but any notion that this, like Marlowe's *Jew,* is ' savage comedy ' is dispelled by a recollection of the rest of the book. If the whole novel were on the comic scale, then undoubtedly this would fit in; but what of the scene where Nicholas defends Smike from the cane of Squeers, a scene which is certainly meant to be taken seriously?—' Touch him at your peril! I will not stand by and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by heaven I will not spare you if you drive me on! ' Or his triumphant cry at the end: ' You are caught, villains, in your own toils! '; or Ralph Nickleby's stagey hiss: ' My curse, my bitter, deadly curse, upon you, boy! ' This, surely, is about the crudest melodrama we get anywhere in Dickens. The unmasking of Pecksniff (' Hear me, rascal! ') is comparatively credible, and by the time we get to *Copperfield* it is significant that the exposure of the villain is performed by a *comic* character, Micawber: ' You Heep of infamy! '

We are forced, then, to the reluctant conclusion that, in the death of Ralph Nickleby, Dickens scarcely knew what he was doing. To bring the melodrama so near to the ' Elizabethan comic,' to the *Jew of Malta* and *Volpone,* required talent of an exceptional kind, but we get the justice of Eliot's general comment on Dickens, ' *decadent* genius,' when we admit that the success of this instance was not only out of keeping with the tone of the whole novel but a throw-back to a kind of writing very much out of keeping with the tone of the time; ' savage comedy ' and saccharine sentiment made strange bedfellows, and the juxtaposition of the two is but another example of that confusion in Dickens's work we mentioned to begin with.

The normal melodrama of Dickens, that which is neither so seriously comic as the death of Ralph Nickleby nor so comically

serious as Nicholas defending Smike, can only be described as rather dull. At its best (*e.g.* the death of Steerforth, the arrest of Jonas, the escape of Sikes) it is thrilling or affecting enough if we shut off the part of our mind that might criticize its quality; that is, it is skilful, but on a low level, whereas the comedy, at its best, is good by any standard. As for the speech of the serious characters, it is enough to remind ourselves of Lizzie Hexham, the heroine of *Our Mutual Friend,* who, as A. W. Ward put it, ' has to discard the colour of her surroundings and talk the conventional dialect as well as express the conventional sentiments of the heroic world.' This applies to nearly all the heroes and heroines of the novels, though the degree of unreality varies a good deal. (We can, I presume, take it for granted that, with his serious characters, Dickens was aiming at reality, and not using their heroic posturings for comic purposes.) Nothing was ever done again by Dickens as crude as *Nickleby,* but one cannot say that the serious characters became more credible as he went on, for Lizzie Hexham, one of the worst examples of the misplaced heroic, occurred in the last novel he completed. It is not quite with Dickens as Mr. Frank Chapman Pointed out with regard to Hardy[5], that one could not say by their style which novels were written first; it is more a question of Dickens's having outgrown some of his cruder notions but not all of them, and equally of having placed in the crudest context some of his finest work.

Examples of the latter bring us at once to those aspects of his coming writing where the influence of the theatre, and of the theatre coupled with the eighteenth-century novelists, was an influence for good. For excellencies embedded in a melodramatic whole, we need look no further than *Oliver Twist,* the second novel he wrote. The workhouse section stands quite apart, in merit, from the rest, but even at the end of the novel there is at least one bright spot, when Mr. Bumble reappears to answer the charge of stealing the trinkets. ' The law supposes,' says Mr. Brownlow, ' That your wife acts under your direction.' ' If the law supposes that,' replies Bumble, ' The law is a ass, a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience.'

We can agree with Mr. George Santayana that this kind of humour is not far from that of Aristophanes or Shakespeare. What concerns us here is that such bright spots in Dickens nearly always occur when a comic character is *holding forth,* occupying the stage, so to speak, addressing the reader/audience as much as, if not more than, the other characters in the book. It is this extra-literary life of his characters which has earned Dickens his greatest applause and his heartiest abuse. On the one hand, we have the popular idea of his characters, that they are as real as life, as our own friends[6], a misconception based on this very fact, that the characters do protrude somehow beyond the novel; on the other hand, the criticisms of G. H. Lewes, Taine and the rest complain of the *undevelopment* of the characters psychologically, Micawber ' al-

ways presenting himself in the same situation, moved with the same springs ' etc. and Mrs. Gamp ' talking incessantly of Mrs. Harris.' But both the uncritical delight and the hypercritical contempt seem indiscriminate when we relate this tendency to its probable source, the stage. G. H. Lewes, many of whose criticisms were very sound, sneered at Dickens for having once remarked that ' every word said by his characters was distinctly *heard* by him.' Bearing in mind the novelist's obsession with the theatre, the remark seems not so much the ' hallucination ' suggested by Lewes as a quite accurate description of Dickens's method of composition. Whether such a method of writing novels is the best, or is even a permissible one by finer standards, is really beside the point for the moment. What matters is that this fundamentally dramatic way of writing was responsible for nearly all that is best in his comic creation. It was the gift of the dramatist rather than the novelist which enabled Dickens to express the ramblings of a Mrs. Gamp and a Flora Finching, or the rhetoric of a Jefferson Brick and a General Choke, with enough reality to convince us and enough exaggeration to astound. When Mrs. Gamp comes ' *sidling and bridling* into the room,' when she remarks that ' rich folks may ride on camels but they won't find it easy to get through a needle's eye,' when she remembers 'the wooden leg gone likeways home to its account' and says after the quarrel with Betsy Prig that ' the words she spoke of Mrs. Harris lambs could not forgive, no, nor worms forget '; when Flora Finching, describing her married life to Little Dorrit, says ' ere we had yet fully detected the housemaid in selling the feathers out of the spare bed *Gout flying upward* soared with Mr. F. to another sphere '; when the Young Columbian defies the British Lion (' Bring forth that Lion! Alone, I dare him! I taunt that Lion! I tell that Lion, that Freedom's hand once twisted in his mane, he rolls a corse before me . . .')—when we come across such things as these, it is not surprising if we are reminded as much of Mrs. Quickly and Pistol and the characters of *The Alchemist* as of Fielding or Sterne or Smollett. Here the talent for the theatre has succeeding in adorning the medium of the novel; here the tradition of English comic writing is taken up by another master; and there is now no question of ' decadent genius,' because the line of comedy is unbroken. What is remarkable, of course, is that Dickens should have been able to carry on this tradition while being also so much in tune with his own age; that he should, in one and the same novel (such as *Chuzzlewit*) give us this supreme type of comedy, with its almost Shakespearean ' suggestiveness,' side by side with the debased and sentimental forms popular in his day; and that he should not only share these more vulgar kinds of wit but even be regarded as the chief exponent of them.

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[5]See ' Hardy the Novelist,' *Scrutiny*, Vol. III, No. 1.

[6]' As many letters were written to the author of *Nickleby* to implore him not to kill poor Smike as had been send by young ladies to the author of *Clarissa* to " save Lovelace's soul alive " ' (from an after-dinner speech in praise of Dickens, quoted in Forster's *Life*.)

## III.

How far the vulgarity, the bad taste, to be found in Dickens's writing can be regarded as his own, and how far it is the literary manner of the age, is a question worth considering. The more we admire his genuine achievements (the comic we have glanced at and the serious concern us later on), the more, of course, we resent the artistic blots upon his work. There is nothing to be gained by denying their existence, though it is too often assumed that the bad writing is all equally contemptible, whereas the gradations between good and bad are many and sometimes the border-line between failure and success drawn so fine that it is difficult to come to any conclusion. To do Dickens common justice, it is necessary, after convicting him of vulgar tastes, to look at the vulgarity of the age he wrote in. We say ' wrote in ' rather than ' lived in ' because it is literary vulgarity we are chiefly concerned with, the bad literary taste of the time.

A comparison of Eliot's between a poem by Lord Herbert of Cherbury and one by Tennyson suggests itself as an opening. The difference between them, says Eliot, ' is not a simple difference of degree between poets. It is something which had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning.' We can apply this, by paraphrase, to Dickens. Contrasting him, not at his best but at his normal level, with (say) Fielding, we might say that the difference was not one of degree between novelists but of ' something which had happened to the mind of England ' between the time of Johnson, Fielding and Gibbon and the time of Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray and Macaulay.

A history of the Sentimental in English literature would be a useful study; lacking it, we must be content here with a few random indications. If we think of the Man of Feeling of the late eighteenth century, of the worst parts of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*, of the decline in the theatre already noted, of the major part of Scott, of the worst but most popular side of Byron . . .; if we couple all this with a hearty, manly, complacent kind of humour, the pedigree of which it would be difficult to trace; with the whimsicality of Charles Lamb; and with that degeneration of eighteenth-century English which would speak of ' drawing the finny tribe from their native element '[7] and which popular nineteenth-century journalism first parodied and then took over seriously . . .; if we bear this background in mind and add to it the spirit of cheap burlesque upon the stage and in periodicals like *Punch*, the gradual pressure upon literature of the ideals of a new commercial class, the strong Puritan reaction against the rakishness of the Regency, the start of the public-school ideal of a Gentleman (no longer the Philosopher of Addison but the Sportsman of an Eton that ragged ' mad Shelley '), above all the swiftly-increasing reading public . . .; bearing this background in mind, it is surely not surprising

[7] *The Modern Miniature*, an anonymous novel, 1790.

that Dickens, coming to literature ' self-made,' almost the infant prodigy, the inimitable Boz, abnormally susceptible to his environment and abnormally desirous of applause, it is surely not surprising that he should become (at his worst, at any rate) the ' half-educated writer for a half-educated public ' and reveal ' more genius than taste.' The surprise should be reserved for the many occasions on which he did *not* conform to the taste of the time. ' I like and admire it extremely,' wrote Lord Jeffrey to Dickens of *The Battle of Life,* and of *The Chimes.* ' The good and the brave are with you, and the truth also.' And this is the voice—the Victorian voice—of one of the great pundits of the Great Reviews!

The finer elements in nineteenth-century literature (to conclude these generalizations) gave way, then, to the grosser. Tennyson and Browning reigned supreme in poetry, farce and melodrama and burlesque held the stage. As far as the general public was concerned, the novel meant Dickens, but we know that a more discriminating section took their Dickens with a pinch of salt; we have already quoted G. H. Lewes and it cannot be denied that there was a group of writers hostile to his reputation. But I don't think it is possible to draw a definite line between novelists like Dickens and Wilkie Collins on the one hand and Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot on the other. For one thing, we know that Dickens praised George Eliot and that Thackeray in his lectures praised Dickens. For another, when Thackeray started the *Cornhill,* its contributors included Trollope, G. H. Lewes, George Eliot *and* Wilkie Collins, and might conceivably have included Dickens could we imagine Dickens writing for any other editor but himself.

But what of the gulf that separates Dickens from Jane Austen, for that is a definite division? Here, surely, we should be content with stating that the gulf exists. For however fine a standard of artistic integrity we grant Jane Austen (and Mrs. Leavis's recent articles in *Scrutiny* give the standard a validity we had previously only vaguely acknowledged) and however obvious it is that such a standard Dickens certainly lacked, we should no more wish to condemn the latter by it than by the standard of Flaubert we should wish to condemn George Sand. Dickens was essentially a *public* writer, it was part of his theatrical instinct that he had to feel the sympathy of every man with him,[8] and we should never forget the effect on a man of this temperament his immediate and unparalleled success must have had. He was a different kind of writer intrinsically from Jane Austen or Emily Brontë or the George Eliot of *Middlemarch,* and his incredible popularity simply widened the gulf. One would not wish to claim as high a place in English literature for Dickens as for these three novelists, because any apology for his submission to the vulgarity of the age can only extenuate the offence, cannot condone it wholly. But one would have to add that some of Dickens's achievements (particularly in comedy) were not only

[8]cf. *The Dickens World* by Humphry House (reviewed in *Scrutiny* for last January).

beyond these writers' grasp but owed little to the taste of the time.

The point is one worth making. We began by saying that those faults in his writing which gratify his detractors' malice and shake his admirers' constancy, should not be considered in isolation but against the literary background of the time. His position as a *public* writer makes this comparison essential; and, just as we need to look beneath the mechanical obscenity of Restoration drama for the occasional flash of wit, so out of the mass of this ' period ' and popular Dickens we must, for a proper appreciation, quarry the enduring parts. ' Period ' need not, in this connection, necessarily imply a sneer; the very worst of Dickens is often merely an *exaggeration* of a prevailing mode of thought, a prevailing manner of expression. One of his most obvious characteristics was this love of exaggeration, of hyperbole[9], and, coupling it with his leaning towards a decadent stage, it is not surprising that the bad taste and the vulgarity which make themselves felt in nine-tenths of the literature of the time should in *his* writings positively shout for recognition. The sickly sentiment of *Dombey* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* is merely an exaggeration of an increasingly popular mode, the logical (if vulgar) development of the Man of Feeling; the tender whimsicality that produced such figures as the Marchioness, the Doll's Dressmaker, Maggie in *Little Dorrit,* Tiny Tim, counts parts of *Shandy* as well as Lamb among its ancestors; and the more sentimental side of Dickens's social criticism, such as the death of Jo in *Bleak House* (' Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen . . . And dying thus around us every day.'), goes along with the pathetic-indignant ballads of Thomas Hood (' One more unfortunate, weary of breath . . .'—' A shroud as well as a shirt . . .'). As for the hearty, back-slapping, ' manly ' tone that occasionally disfigures his pages, we need only remark that he shares the disfigurement with Scott, Landor, Hawthorne, Thackeray, Reade and Browning. While the very worst piece of decadent Regency journalese that might be chosen from Dickens's sometimes appalling style would seem comparatively well-written beside many pages of Carlyle's *French Revolution.*

To make up one's mind in regard to the best and the worst of Dickens is not very difficult; it is where he hovers on the brink of success that one hesitates to cast judgment. Jo in *Bleak House* might have ' come off ' had not Dickens gone so headlong after the pathetic effect; but that is a case which misses success by several pocket-handkerchiefs; what are we to say of the heroine of *Little Dorrit,* where the pathos is held so skilfully in check? Or of characters like Esther Summerson, who are only a shade too good to be true?

And the many occasions when the sentimental shakes hands

[9]Shown in the most trivial instances; *e.g.* in the Preface to *Little Dorrit,* where he cannot speak simply of ' a small boy carrying a baby ' but must say ' the smallest boy I ever conversed with, carrying the largest baby I ever saw.'

with reality, when the pathetic merges into the satiric? It is easy to sneer at this confusion in Dickens, more difficult to analyse the effect it has on one. I can never come to a decision about the funeral of Anthony Chuzzlewit. There are so many small points, satiric or pathetic or both at once, that add to the impression of the whole: the satisfaction of the undertaker Mould at the avaricious but conscience-stricken Jonas's having ordered a procession regardless of expense ; his professional delight giving way to his professional mourning for the deceased (' Quickly becoming depressed again, he sighed; looked into the crown of his hat, as if for comfort; put it on without finding any; and slowly departed '); the delight of Mrs. Gamp and the Mutes at the refreshments provided; the bandying of courtesies between Pecksniff and the Doctor; the one sincere mourner, Chuffey, being reproved by the rest for his indecent distress at the grave-side; the gradual composure of Jonas once the body has been buried . . .; the whole of this accumulation of hypocrisy leading to the final paragraphs of the chapter, where ' Mrs. Gamp went home to the bird-fancier's and was knocked up again that night for a birth of twins . . .' etc., and where, in the graveyard, ' the night was dark and wet; the rain fell silently among the stagnant weeds and nettles. One new mound was there which had not been there last night. Time, burrowing like a mole below the ground, had marked his track by throwing up another heap of earth. And that was all.'

If this chapter of *Chuzzlewit* be a failure, through striving too obviously after its effects, then it is a failure very near to success. The same border-line of achievement I seem to find in such things as the satire on Chancery in *Bleak House,* the return of the convict Magwitch in *Great Expectations,* the farewell to the Marshalsea in *Little Dorrit.* His love of exaggeration, his habit of over-emphasis, his desire to enforce a point already driven home, told heavily against Dickens's natural talent as a master of expression. But sometimes (and, strangely enough, where his passion for social justice was most strongly roused) he could write with remarkable restraint.

## IV.[10]

' Figuratively speaking, I travel for the house of Human Interest brothers, and have rather a large connection in the fancy goods way.' This celebrated epigram from the introduction to *The Uncommercial Traveller* indicates, if in a rather ' whimsical ' and self-satisfied manner, the nature of one side of Dickens's ' interest in social reform.' The inverted commas of the latter phrase suggest, perhaps, the distinction we wish to make between this ' reporting ' of social abuses and that very serious (even where sometimes apparently ' comic ') criticism of society which bears not merely the contemporary, particular reference, but the universal.

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[10]A few phrases in this section occur in my review of Mr. House's *The Dickens World* in *Scrutiny* X. 3. The essay was written before the review.

For the ' interest in social reform ' proper is matter for the historian rather than the literary critic, and can be appreciated by standards that have nothing to do with literature. It is as well to make this distinction, even if equally necessary to grant that it cannot be absolute. *The Uncommercial Traveller* and *American Notes* give us the reporting pure and simple, the candid survey of public institutions here and in the States, the writer's praise or censure resting securely on the facts recorded. Even where, as in the case of negro slavery, Dickens's indignation lets loose a torrent of scornful words, the tirade is followed by a cool transcription of some of the slave-advertisements of the time:—' Ran away, a negro woman and two children. A few days before she went off, I burned her with a hot iron on the left side of her face. I tried to make the letter M.'—' Ran away, a negro named Arthur. Has a considerable scar across his breast and each arm, made by a knife; loves to talk much of the goodness of God.'—' Ran away, a negro named George Washington . . .' etc.

On the other hand, *Oliver Twist, Martin Chuzzlewit, Bleak House, Little Dorrit,* give us a Dickens whose criticism of society is part and parcel of his skill and virtue as a novelist. Between the two kinds, of perhaps almost equal interest to the historian and to the literary critic, lies that impressive production, *Hard Times.*

The distinction, we said, cannot be absolute. Someone said of Shakespeare that his finest poetry occurs in his most dramatic moments, and we shall find with Dickens that he is at his very best as a ' social critic ' when he is displaying his greatest talent as a novelist. *Oliver Twist* takes the same precedence over *The Uncommercial Traveller* and *American Notes* as Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* must over his *Proposal for the Poor.*

*Oliver Twist* is not one of the novels of Dickens that have worn particularly well. Like Keats's *Nightingale,* it has ' suffered in the simplifying memory.' It has about it the stigma of such low connections as Beerbohm Tree's stage version, where it was served up as a typical Victorian melodrama, on the same level as *East Lynne.* But to classify it as such is to forget the way in which the story opens.

In his introduction to the *Everyman* edition, G. K. Chesterton described the early chapters of *Oliver* as ' curious and important,' and he was thinking chiefly of their contrast, in the matter of social criticism, with the ' idealistic outbursts of the Great Reformers.' But the descriptions of the reformed workhouse have a literary importance as well. ' The Board established the rule,' says Dickens, ' That all poor people should have the alternative of being starved by a gradual process in the house or by a quick one out of it . . .' They also ' undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great cost of a suit in Doctors' Commons, and instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him and made him a bachelor. There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, but the

board were long-headed men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel, and that frightened people.'

If we wish to appreciate this from the point of view of social criticism alone, we can turn up the historical parallel in Mr. and Mrs. Hammond's book *The Age of the Chartists,* where the system is discussed in remarkably similar terms: ' They kept the mixed workhouse, but they classified the inmates, forbidding any communication between the different classes. In this way, husbands and wives, parents and children, were kept rigorously apart . . .'

But, from the point of view of Dickens as a novelist, what is the importance of the *Oliver* passage? Nothing, to begin with, could be less sentimental. The irony is refreshingly cool. The first sentence, indeed—' they established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative of being starved by a gradual process in the house or by a quick one out of it '—might almost have been written by Swift, certainly by Fielding. But the apparent detachment goes along with something very different. It was the particular genius of Dickens that he could always put his finger on the social evil which hurt the sufferer the most. He was always ' seeing people,' thinking in terms of flesh and blood rather than in ideas or institutions, and such a bent of mind, it will be agreed, is essentially the novelist's. He saw the Workhouse Board not as an institution but as so many individuals anxious to assert their authority at someone's else's expense, as so many people given by the accident of fortune power over the lives and conduct of others, firmly convinced that their own good fortune meant virtue and the distress of the others vice. He was aware of the fact that the petty regulation (as in the passage quoted) was not only the one that hurt the pauper most keenly but the one the Board got the most pleasure out of inflicting. The exaggeration here is simply the necessary exaggeration of art, the necessary ' fine excess.'

The attitude of the Board, the relation between the workhouse authorities and the pauper, were to the novelist only examples of a universal theme, a theme not restricted to the nineteenth century or to workhouses alone. So that any appreciation of Dickens which restricts itself merely to the aptitude of his writing to the immediate social background is giving us a very small part of the real Dickens, no more than we should get of Shakespeare if we took Falstaff to be simply a commentary on the reign of Henry the Fourth or of Swift if we took the satire of the horses to apply only to the politicians of Queen Anne.

What the Dickensian theme is a second quotation enforces. Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker, is admiring the brass buttons on Mr. Bumble's coat. ' Dear me, what a very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble, I never noticed it before.' ' Yes, I think it is rather pretty,' replies the beadle, ' The die is the same as the parochial seal—the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented it to me on New Year's morning, Mr. Sowerberry; I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on

that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.'

The very off-handedness of that reference points the moral implication. It is the very opposite of sentimentality, achieving in an economical effectiveness what a whole page of pathos might have failed to do. It is the carelessness here (and later on, when Bumble refers to ' two Irish labourers and a coalheaver,' as to so much cattle) that gives the irony its force. It is not only the character of Bumble that is shown up by these remarks, but the habit of mind of the institution he represents—the refusal to take into account the individual.

Dickens is here using the resources of the novel towards a practical end which was largely realised some years later[11]. But he is not less of a novelist because he is concerned so directly with social issues; on the contrary, he gains in stature as a writer, as an artist, by the manner in which he presents his criticism. If this were not so, such parts of his work would be as dead now as other nineteenth-century ' novels with a purpose.' The gift, the gift of the artist, for perceiving the fundamental beneath the particular, saves him. Most of the evils he represented in *Oliver* have long since been cleared away, but there remains the universal significance of the relation between Bumble's sort, personifying Authority, and the ' two Irish labourers and a coalheaver,' personifying Dependence. This is one of the fundamental themes of literature—' the insolence of office '—and it has never been better developed than in the novels of Fielding and Dickens. That off-handed reference of Bumble's to the ' reduced tradesman who died in a doorway at midnight ' can only be compared with the celebrated parenthesis in *Joseph Andrews* on the kind-hearted postillion who lends the naked hero his coat—' A lad,' says Fielding, ' that hath since been transported for robbing a henroost.'

It is this insistence on the personal, this hatred of the institution for its ignoring the human element (' classifying the inmates '), that is typical of all Dickens's writing on social justice. Like Cobbett, he was concerned not only for the welfare of the poor but for their dignity; unlike Cobbett, he did not see the remedy in economics. Probably he saw no remedies at all, save the fundamental Christian one. In *Hard Times,* his most impressive statement of the problems of poverty, he insists merely upon a better understanding between the conflicting parties; not only between the labourer and the owner of labour, but between the maltreated labourer and the would-be reformer. ' In an England gone mad about a minor theory,' says Chesterton, ' He reasserted the original idea—that no one in the state must be too weak to influence the state.' It is a mistake to look in Dickens's writings for ' solutions '; in *Hard Times* the view he takes is too long, and in *The Uncommercial Traveller* probably too short, to suit either the economist or the politician. It is the *presenting* of the case which we should

[11]Mr. House, in *The Dickens World,* points out that Dickens was never so much of a pioneer as to be far ahead of public sympathies.

naturally expect from a novelist embarked upon this theme, and *Hard Times* does that for us, unforgettably. The description of Coketown at the beginning of the book owes nothing to sentimentality:—' Let us strike the key-note, Coketown, before pursuing our tune. It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it . . . It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever, and never got uncoiled . . . It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another . . . You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful; the jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either . . .'

V.

We have, then, an important part of Dickens's work which would contradict most of the generalizations one could make about him: cool irony instead of sentimentality or pathos, deliberate under-statement instead of hyperbole. The recognition of these unexpected qualities should reinforce the idea of his diversity. No attempt to reconcile all the elements to be found in his writings would be likely to meet with success, and what we have attempted here, in connection with the influence of the theatre and with the vulgarity of his age, can only be said to have drawn a few of the main strands together. We have not touched on his Comedy of the Grotesque (the Quilps, the Krooks, the Smallweeds); on his power of description, so impressive at its best (the Gordon Riots in *Barnaby,* the Fall of the Bastille in *A Tale of Two Cities,* the London of *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*) but at its worst a mere repetition of stale images and cheap effects; nor on that large question, his influence on English literature.

On the latter point, it must be admitted that the influence was partly for bad. Mr. O'Faoláin, in Mr. Verschoyle's symposium *The English Novelists,* gives an example of ' Dickensian ' journalese, and it is to be feared that on his most vulgar side the Inimitable Boz was only too imitable. Though more important novelists, such as George Eliot, Hardy and Conrad, were to some extent affected by him, the main influence of Dickens must be admitted to have been on popular literature, such as Conan Doyle's—whose *Firm of Girdlestone* is a particularly good example.

R. C. Churchill.

# COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

## MASTER OF THE KING'S MUSICK, 1942

FROM the anonymous minstrelsy of the court of Edward IV, to the direction of the string and wind band of Henry VIII, and thence to the resplendent orchestra, founded on French models, of the court of Charles II, the office of Master of the King's Musick (the title was first used, it would seem, of a foreigner, Nicholas Lanier, in 1626) was entirely professional and executive. His function was to assist at courtly entertainments, an executive musician with clearly defined practical duties as a *chef d'orchestre*. As time has gone by and music has become less intimately associated with monarchs, the duties of the Master of the King's Music, like those of the Poet Laureate, have grown broader and less specific; he has become less a courtly than a national institution. But if the function of the Master of the King's Musick is now vague, it is not entirely meaningless. Some intimation of the change is perhaps implicit in the case of William Boyce who, succeeding to the office in the middle of the eighteenth century, was not so much a performer as a distinguished minor composer and a collector and preserver of the masterpieces of sixteenth and seventeenth century church music at a time when, of course, anything other than contemporary music was normally regarded in a very patronising spirit. To-day, the Master of the King's Music should act as a focal point of the musical life of our society; he should sum up the trends of creative impulse in the country; he should as a distinguished teacher preserve and strengthen the national musical heritage and influence the nature of musical education from elementary school to academy; and, as a relatively minor part of his activity, he should be able to produce effective occasional music if it should be necessary. I suppose creative ability is not an absolutely essential requirement: but he will certainly do all these things more adequately and more richly if he is himself a creative artist. Perhaps it is significant of the passive rather than active nature of our musical culture in the twentieth century that the late Master of the King's Music, Sir Walford Davies, should have been not a creative artist, but essentially a teacher and expositor. Nowadays we ' appreciate ' music so much that we have no time left to make it.

In living memory the one unquestionably valid Master of the King's Music was Sir Edward Elgar, and I think the reason for this was partly because Elgar was a genius, partly because he was probably the last composer unequivocally to endorse and to be endorsed by a social order. Elgar was a great creative artist; but it was just as natural for him to compose *Pomp and Circumstance* and the other occasional musics that so alarm the purists as it was for him to compose the *Introduction and Allegro* or the *Enigma Variations*. One may deplore the enormous gap, in the matter of value, between Elgar's ' serious ' and his ' occasional ' work; one may think that

it witnessed to a certain disintegration, relative at least to Byrd's or Purcell's England, implicit in the society that produced him; but at least that distintegration hadn't gone so far that one couldn't recognize the good and the bad as emanating from the same hand. The ' good ' things may have embodied the virtues of Edwardian civilization as consummated in its greatest genius, the ' bad ' things may have embodied the superficial, tawdry and even repulsive aspects of that civilization; nonetheless it was the *same* civilization, homogeneous thus far, that we can see that even the bad things might potentially have been virtues, had they not taken the wrong turning. The case of Elgar's bad music is therefore much simpler than that of, say, Sibelius's, for there is nothing in Sibelius's background to account for the fact that the mind that created the *Fourth Symphony* should also have written *Finlandia* and the drawing-room pieces for piano. Besides, much of Elgar's bad music is so devilishly effective. Even to-day, the Pomp and Circumstances will bring tears to the eyes and lumps to the throats of bare-headed multitudes: if you believe in this kind of thing (and in our half-hearted way we still do or are increasingly supposed to) you may as well indulge with manly gusto instead of a compromising snivel.

To Elgar as Master of the King's Music the obvious successor was, and is, Vaughan Williams—not such a great composer, but an equally great personality, and a more intelligent man, as befits our greater sophistication. Vaughan Williams is so much the most commanding personality in English music over the last thirty years that it is difficult to imagine that the English musical renaissance could have happened without him. Perhaps it would, if more slowly; but certainly there is no one man to whom English music owes so much, not only for his creative work, but for the importance of his part in the re-establishment of the English Tudor heritage, and of British folk music behind that—branches of his activity from which his creative work can hardly, of course, be separated. Moreover Vaughan Williams has not only been the mainspring of creative musicians in this country: he has also been indefatigable in his efforts to re-establish a national musical culture that is more than a matter for artists. He has written and arranged quantities of music for schools and colleges, and he has composed stirring music for every kind of national festival that offered itself—none of it bad as Elgar's is bad, none of it perhaps as tritely effective and even inspired. He is still writing ' household ' music and unison choral songs of courage and victory and has virtually been Master of the King's Music for the last twenty or more years. Why he hasn't officially received the title I don't know. Maybe he wasn't offered it, not having quite the right kind of friends; maybe when it was offered he wouldn't accept. But if the office means anything it is one to be filled by a man with Vaughan William's record, and with his capabilities.

In lieu of V.W., I should have thought that William Walton was the obvious choice, especially considering his by now universal acceptance as England's leading composer (assuming that Vaughan

Williams belongs to a past generation), and considering the depressingly well-meaning self-conscious Elgarizing in which Walton indulges in his own occasional music. (At least Elgar meant what he said, though one mayn't like it very much, whereas Walton is merely pretending or perhaps wishing to feel as Elgar felt in his most pompous and circumstantial mood). I suppose Walton stood no chance because of the curious notion, nurtured in the nineteenth century, that no one is capable of mastering the King's Music until he has reached the age of sixty; however this may be, I must admit that the appointment to the office of Sir Arnold Bax seemed to me both surprising and perverse.

I do not intend this as a reflection on Bax's talents: merely it seems to me that he has played no part in English musical life, that he has done nothing to mould the English renaissance, and that in his creative work he is neither altogether a contemporary composer nor representatively an English one. All the qualifications that make Vaughan Williams so obvious a candidate Bax lacks; almost his only qualification is his prodigious facility, and this is a somewhat dubious asset except in so far as it will enable him, if necessity arises, to produce occasional works almost without noticing and therefore without dissipating energies that might be more profitably employed.

I have been listening recently to the records of the Bax album of the English Music Society, and the three works here recorded seem neatly to sum up his virtues and defects. The *Nonet,* like far too much of Bax's music, is a perfunctory work in which the surface gesture is substituted for true musical substance. Bax, though at his best he is more, is, to begin with, a belated nineteenth-century romantic rhapsodist, and like all such composers he has to work at high pressure for his music to sound convincing. Like Delius, he is at his best when dealing with a solo instrument or voice which rhapsodically soars above, and gives contour and virility to, senuous chromatic harmony and quivering orchestral colour: but his harmony has little of that volatile quality—that unending ebb and flow in the component lines—that makes it almost possible to refer to Delius's technique as ' harmonic polyphony,' and in the *Nonet* and other works in which he is mainly interested in the exploitation of colour and of sonorous device the flow of the chromaticisms is not powerful enough to give the work coherence—it becomes a gallimaufry of ill-collated impressions which, stripped of their colouristic and harmonic decoration and reduced to melodic ideas, seem at best uninteresting and at worst unequivocally tawdry. Of course the *Nonet,* being unassuming, is in patches charming and a very beautiful noise; but fundamentally its faults are, I think, the same as those which, in more pretentious works such as the first three piano sonatas, produce so unsympathetic an impression of rodomontade. Significantly enough, the writing for the instrument itself becomes, in the sonatas, for all its volubility, curiously frustrated and ineffective.

Bax's music is ' fat ' music and we all nowadays find stringency

more congenial: but if the *Nonet* confirms one's prejudices the other two works in this volume indicate how dangerous it is, with a composer as facile as Bax, to jump to conclusions, for both, if limited, are extremely beautiful, moving and original creations. The *Sonata* for viola and piano is one of the composer's most concentrated and consistent works, and here the experiments in sonorous balance—which are lovely and unusual, particularly the use of the silvery top registers of the piano against the lower range of the viola—are directly the product of the musical material, rather than substitutes for it. The lyrical ideas, plentiful and sustained and of a ripe intimate quality romantically song-like in its suave conjunct motion and heroically leaping octaves and fifths, seem themselves to dictate the tone colour and the placing of the keyboard's chromaticisms; indeed the viola is probably the instrument closest to Bax's vein of mellow, elegiac ' Celtic ' lyricism. The first movement is a rhapsody which slowly merges out of whispered phrases and then subsides into quivering silence: the Scherzo, in Bax's ' barbaric ' rhythmic manner, is finely incisive, modal and pentatonic in melodic feeling, free of any of the padding and empty passage-work into which this type of movement may easily degenerate; and contains a very beautiful, celtic-flavoured, folk-song-like trio. The final lento begins with a widely arching line containing suddenly piercing leaps of seventh and ninth, with acute dissonant chromaticisms in the piano part, and then merges into an epilogue, based on material from the first movement extended and resolved, that attains to a tender radiance, a kind of purgation, an almost classic sense of poignant feeling intensely disciplined, which is very rare indeed in music that so habitually wears its heart on its sleeve. It is of course a music of nostalgia; but I did not find that it cloyed on repeated hearings.

The other work, the choral *Ora Mater Filium,* starts rather like a Peter Warlock chromatic reinterpretation of mediæval polyphony, but as soon as it gets into its stride becomes a completely original choral creation of considerable importance. And its originality does not consist so much in harmonic resource—or at least only incidentally—as in the extraordinary efflorescence of the linear rhapsody. The enormous rhapsodic growth of the lines, shooting and whirling in tremendous spans, becomes at the climaxes so elaborate as to be almost heterophonic; and the balance of the vocal resources, the daring of the chromatic and diatonic harmonic relations, though brilliant and sumptuous in themselves, are of those whirling lines genuinely the product. The premisses the music starts from are mediæval; and yet the resultant achievement of the astoundingly effective and difficult vocal writing is unlike anything else in English musical history and is an achievement which, if it seems to have but little connection with the contemporary world, certainly does not seem to bear any obvious relation to past worlds either. This music lives in a wild sumptuous universe of its own passionate creation, a world of fabulous magic which Bax attains to only once or twice in his whole prolific output—in the *Third Symphony* and the *Sym-*

*phonic Variations* for instance—but which is, I think, even more than the elegiac nostalgia of the Viola Sonata, what makes his contribution fundamentally a valuable one, if one very much on the margin of English music.

But it is as a symphonist that Bax would wish to be recognized, and to recognize him is difficult because it seems to be next to impossible to hear the works performed, partly owing, no doubt, to their great complexity and to the terrific resources they call for. The case for the prosecution used to say that Bax's symphonies sound like the same symphony seven times over; or, with Mr. Constant Lambert, that they are not symphonies at all but extended symphonic poems. The first of these charges, considering the scanty opportunities for hearing the music, is perhaps merely flippant; and as for the second, one must remember that it is not legitimate to introduce an act of uniformity against symphonists. Though one may feel (ignorantly) dubious of following Edwin Evans and Robin Hull (among others) as far in the contrary direction as to claim that Bax's symphonies, if performed and studied, would be recognised as an achievement comparable in importance and scope with those of Sibelius, one is bound to admit that these works do manifest tremendous creative energy and originality, and that their carefully complex formal processes—their ' embryonic ' introductions, polyphonic-cum-chromatic-harmonic evolution, and apotheotic epilogues consummating the emotional temper of the whole three-movement work—are, if tensely handled, as musically logical and original as the more specifically elliptical methods of Sibelius, and show a consistent attempt to achieve order both emotional and musical out of the immense exuberance of the composer's rhapsodic zest: any other meaning there may be in the words ' symphonic form ' is after all a matter of academic interest only. Of Bax's symphonies I have never heard No. 5 (which many people consider the finest) or No. 6; and my acquaintance with Nos. 1, 2 and 7 is too superficial to give adequate backing to my feeling that they are excessively violent and sultry in their subjective emotionalism. But No. 4 is a very beautiful, ripely romantic composition in which the exquisite orchestration is inseparable from the flow of the lines, genuinely culminating in the triumphantly vibrant epilogue; and No. 3 still more, is a big work, heroic in its weird antediluvian way, with the sinister and unique orchestral colouring again created by the intrinsic nature of the lyrical material, with the slow mysterious glimmer of its opening and the expansive exotic pageantry and ultimate serenity of the chorale-like close. (There is a distant hint of this in Bax's very personal use of ' English ' parallel fifths in the first movement of the viola sonata). But when it is genuine (it may easily become a mere formula) Bax's pageantry could hardly be said to be of an ' occasional ' order: and one cannot help thinking it odd that the creator of this dark universe of primeval gods and satyrs should have become the honoured guardian of British musical respectability. Perhaps there's some virtue merely in the extent of the output; being so vast, the few things in it that really matter may easily pass unnoticed, along with their ' unacceptable ' implications.

W.H.M.

# POETRY AND POLITICS

*LIFE AND THE POET, by Stephen Spender (Searchlight Book, No. 18, Secker and Warburg, 2/-).*

In the inquest on the 30's now proceeding some special attention has been paid to the position of the left and leftish intellectuals. As might be expected, the sharpest criticism has come from writers like Brogan and Orwell who were not publicly committed to any particular programme. *Life and the Poet,* on the other hand, is the first attempt by a writer who was committed—to the near-communist line with all that this implied for art—to develop and re-formulate his previous conception of the poet's function in relation to the political crisis of our time. Abandoning the naïve attitude that lay behind his propaganda piece, *Trial of a Judge,* Spender has become aware of a much more complex relationship between ' politics ' and ' culture.' The political crisis, as he now sees it, is also a cultural crisis.

> ' What decides the nature of political institutions is ultimately values deriving from religion, philosophy, scientific methods and art. We are living in a time of the general breakdown of traditional values. Dictatorships, fascism, commercial individualism are the outward forms of the breakdown of the traditional values of Christian society.'

The test of social forms is the extent to which they release and develop the potentialities of the individual; when, as at present, they obviously fail to do anything of the kind for the great majority, the poet is tempted to tackle the social problem directly and to use his art as an instrument of action. To do so, however, is to lose sight of the ends in concentration on the means; the poet's function is to keep the ends in sight.

> ' All this must be lived through and endured. Political evils must be met by other, greater political evils until the war is won. Yet, just because of this, it is all the more important that the ' happy few ' who uphold values of art, poetry and science should state as clearly as they can what the function of those values in life is, in order that new social patterns may grow around such an understanding . . .
>
> ' So the task of creative minds (victims as much as anyone else of the modern machine) is to exercise their imaginations to create works of art which will make their fellow-beings conscious of the conditions and needs of human existence.'

Poets, in short, are concerned with the values that lie beyond politics and in which alone political institutions find their justification. This does not mean that they will abstract themselves from the urgencies of the present but that their essential task is to help create the conditions without which no humanly satisfactory solution of our clamorous social problems is likely to be found.

All this, though not exactly new, is far from commonplace, and one would like to think that Spender's prestige as a poet might gain a sympathetic hearing for ideas concerning poetry and culture that cut rather deeper than the fashionable over-simplifications. If one hesitates to express this hope with any confidence this is because the themes that are stated clearly enough in the first chapter are developed in a way that seems unlikely to gain for them the attention they deserve. Although some degree of generalisation is inevitable in a brief account of big topics there was surely no need for the persistent abstraction that one finds in this essay: potentously solemn generalities about ' Life ' and the repetition of such phrases as 'the poetic attitude,' ' the universal nature of man's being,' ' the universal qualities of life ' and so on serve merely to absolve writer and reader from hard thinking and clear realization. Complex questions, ranging from the relations of poetry and primitive magic to a theory of poetic communication, are handled with an assurance that is not always matched by their relevance. Particular judgments are marked by a similar assurance that is not always justified: thus Auden gets the same kind of emphasis as Yeats, Eliot and Lawrence; and although the short summaries of the work of these poets might serve the uninitiated as an introduction to the general trends of modern poetry there is a good deal that can only confirm popular prejudice.

> ' Yeats appealed to the aristocratic tradition and a cosmic spiritualism against the phenomena of the contemporary world. D. H. Lawrence appealed to the sexual instinct . . . Through the sex of each individual he approaches his dark gods, who are the doorways to the collective unconscious, a pooled life where men and women transcend their own individuality in the act of sex, and where the awareness of modern beings becomes merged into the totality of the past.'

Lawrence would have guffawed at that last sentence. There is a similar uncritical distortion in the following:—

> ' When Eliot enters into the spiritual ecstasy of *Ash Wednesday* we are convinced of the beauty of his experience, but he seems to have shrunk from the universal spirit brooding over *The Waste Land* to one who has a vision of attaining his own personal salvation.'

And in what sense does communist poetry ' include '—even if it ' does not really heal '—' the devastation of the Waste Land ' ?

In the chapter on modern poetry (' Poets Must be Truthful ') from which I have just quoted Spender explains the political leanings of his own generation of writers:—

> ' The younger poets who started to write in the late 1920's lived in a time of increasing despair during the slump and then the preparations for the present war, admired the destructive visions of Yeats and Eliot, but were less satisfied perhaps with their spiritual consolations. At the same time they felt the need for

a constructive policy for changing life: it had to cope with the destruction which they saw. An ecstatic isolation didn't seem sufficient.

'This was the state of mind that led them to communist politics.'

It is interesting to put this beside a comparable passage in George Orwell's *Inside the Whale*. It is not only that Spender sees simply the generous motives (which certainly existed) and ignores the less creditable ones, such as the individual's need for rebellious self-assertion combined with the need for a dogmatic religion, and the influence of fashion in the comparative security of middle-class life in England in the 30's—all of which Orwell is aware of; Orwell's generalisations are more closely related to a particular instance (in this case a few lines from Auden's *Spain*), and he shows a far greater capacity for critical detachment. It is this that makes his descriptions of literary politics so much more crisp and lively than anything to be found in Spender's more ambitious essay, in long passages of which the writing is of a kind that makes even sound positions seem platitudinous and unconvincing.

*Life and the Poet*, in fact, is not merely a diagnosis and a search for a remedy, it is also a symptom. The literary situation of the past decade was largely conditioned by three factors: the existence of a vast, amorphous reading public caring little or nothing for poetry, the consequent organization of 'serious' writers in small self-supporting groups, and the attraction for the young of the confident orthodoxy of communism. *Life and the Poet*—'this general discussion of the attitude of the poet to reality'—is a product of that situation. Whilst disengaging himself from the crudities of the Marxist approach to literature Spender is still conscious of the comrades looking over his shoulder. This makes him diffident and hesitant where he should have been clear and firm, just as the support he has derived from a group accounts for the rather portentous manner in which he invokes the larger mysteries or delivers some of his literary judgments, where a little more diffidence might have been in place. At the same time the fact that he is writing for a public needing to be persuaded that poetry is a serious activity accounts for the told-to-the-children air, the gratuitous metaphors and analogies and the excessive simplification that one comes on throughout. That is, he does not write without the expectation of criticism, but he writes without the expectation of that trained and sharpened criticism which, ideally speaking is the contribution of the Common Reader to the creative situation.

Perhaps the moral of all this is that the solution of the vast questions embarked on in *Life and the Poet* depends on a co-operative effort not easily obtained in the present state of our culture.

L. C. KNIGHTS.

# A PRESCRIPTION FOR THE WEST

*THE RECOVERY OF THE WEST, by Michael Roberts* (*Faber*, 12/6).

The ' collapse ' implied by the looked-for ' recovery ' is the now too-familiar ' spiritual *malaise*,' the ' decline of culture,' the ' disillusion of the post-war years '; but Mr. Roberts's exposition of this theme relies not upon the evidence of quotation or repetition of instances, but rather on the telling observation and the meaningful statement. The impression is, though, that these really are telling and meaningful, provided one has the key; that there is some audience capable of integrating the scattered dogmatisms—

> ' All civilization rests on the capacity to recognize true authority and to preserve a sound tradition.'
>
> ' . . . the doctrine that we should disregard traditional advice and aim at our own self-fulfillment offers neither consolation, guidance, nor inspiration.'
>
> ' Whatever our explicit beliefs may be, fundamentally we agree in recognizing certain forms of conduct and certain steps of mind as evil, and we differ only in our estimate of the ultimate effects of some other forms of conduct and states of mind that are less obviously evil.'

and of interpreting the significant allusions—

> ' . . . a philosophy that tells us that suicidal beliefs are suicidal and useless beliefs useless, does not fulfil the classical aims of philosophy. Yet some of the most acute minds of our time have concerned themselves with the pursuit of these sterilities.'
>
> ' People who consider themselves advanced and enlightened . . . detect stupidity, self-interest or a psycho-pathological condition, in all generous enthusiasm, but they can offer nothing better and they wait with cynical indifference for an apocalyptic visitation to change the world.'

It is important for those not convinced by this desultory procedure to determine what constitutes the unseen audience beyond Mr. Roberts's footlights; and a suggestion that presents itself very readily to the speculative is that the nucleus of this assumed audience might easily be supposed to be the readers of the ' only two serious literary papers in England: an admirable quarterly called *Scrutiny*, with a small circulation, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, which, like the more serious libraries, had fewer readers in 1938 than in 1922.' It may be doubted whether newsagents' bills would afford evidence for as much convergence of these two publics as Mr. Roberts perhaps supposes; but it would be uncharitable to pretend that one didn't know what he meant. It is interesting to note, in passing, the implied attributes of this circle. It must be a strong distaste for Marxism that allows Mr. Roberts to dispose of it in two-and-a-half pages—' as a basis of prophecy

Marxism has been a total failure.' Spengler, one gathers, is regarded as many staff officers regard astrologers—with contemptuous fascination. Logical positivism as an infantile disorder has spread sufficient infection to require nearly a whole chapter of fumigation. And a liking for Lawrence is an understandable heresy—' A romantic as gentle and civilized as D. H. Lawrence sometimes forgets how much he owes to the discipline and conventions he despises '; but if we cede a point on Lawrence, Mr. Roberts makes us a handsome quid pro quo of *New Signatures*—' The recognition of disintegration and futility was mistaken for the disease itself, and no distinction was drawn between the writers whose prophetic insight sprang from an inner certainty of judgment and those whose work expressed the spirit of the age only through its own inherent confusion. Eliot's poetry, and less certainly that of Yeats, was in the prophetic tradition, the tradition not of Cassandra but of Isaiah and Ezekiel.' It should be recalled that Mr. Roberts edited the *Faber Book*. And perhaps we should regard as a summing-up a reference to ' intellectuals of the second rank ' who ' may retain a liking for Mozart, a habit of personal kindness, or a certain squeamishness about conduct that might once have been thought immoral, but [who] keep these isolated values as so much bric-à-brac—they have no intellectual system holding them together.' If a bow at a venture, that was at worst a near miss on one or two targets one can think of.

It is necessary to envisage the intended public fairly clearly, because Mr. Roberts doesn't so much deduce his conclusions from his premises as distil them from his readers' supposed preconceptions. His logic is primarily rhetorical—

> ' To say that the invention of cheap, effective methods of contraception wholly accounts for the declining birth-rate is to assume that people have never wanted to have more than one or two children. This assumption implies that the human race has always wanted to put an end to its own existence, and has at last found the means of doing so.'

that is, his deductions, if certainly true, are trivial, or if not trivial, are much less certainly true. Enough passages like the above could be found (and possibly will be) to yield Professor Stebbing cannon-fodder for at least a chapter, if not for a whole Pelican. But it isn't necessarily to Mr. Roberts's discredit that his argument proceeds in this way: had he adopted the scientific approach and enumerated the instances that provide the evidence for his inductive generalizations, and then drawn his conclusions by strictly formal processes, he would certainly have proved much less more convincingly: he would probably have proved hardly anything at all of interest. Contemporary anthropology and social psychology are still at a stage where the conclusions demanded by the necessity for political action (and inaction) can only be reached by filling in large gaps in the available evidence with reasonable assumption. And the assumptions made by Mr. Roberts's projected audience are probably

as reasonable as most; and that he doesn't always choose to make use even of the available evidence is doubtless in the interests of brevity.

The advantages of thus assuming a community of understanding with his readers are twofold. Firstly, he can, without lengthy citation, recreate the picture of a dissolving world, of the loss of moral certainty, of the decay of confidence in divine sanctions, and of the consequent prevalence of a sense of boredom and frustration, reflected in the conduct of public affairs. And secondly, to a literary audience, he can by a shift of emphasis suggest the solution; because it is fairly certain that for the understanding and enjoyment of much literature some ethical notions are indispensable: and it seems a very reasonable transposition to suggest that in the realms of activity with which literature deals (called, at one time, ' life ') a similar basis for ordering experience is equally indispensable. A similar shift of attention may be detected in others of our contemporaries. The argument may be simply summarised. Firstly, happiness cannot be captured by pursuing it. ' In the end, we find that personal satisfaction, national greatness and human survival are not ends at which we can aim directly. Courage, prudence, generosity and truthfulness promote these ends, but only if we accept them as absolute values and look for no reward. To aim only at saving our own life, or that of the race, is to lose all that makes it valuable.' ' Satisfaction ' is in fact an incidental by-product of fulfilling one's ' duties,' rather than the result of claiming one's ' rights.' ' Social vitality is bound up with a tradition of devotion to specific virtues; it decays when that tradition breaks down into a passion for cheap amusement and amoral liberty of action. When people feel their individual rights more keenly than their obligations to each other, and when they feel no responsibility for good workmanship or for the arts and sciences, their community is already decadent or unhealthy.' But a feeling for one's responsibilities is something that follows from the possession of a ' sense of value.' ' If we hold strongly a sense of specific and authoritative values, if we willingly accept the responsibilities they involve, then the question of the purpose of life disappears.' And the ' sense of value ' is something that finds its support in acceptance of supernatural authority. ' When there is a strong belief that the known moral law springs from the will of God, not only is morality strong, but also life is felt to have significance and value; when that faith decays into a belief in prudence, convenience, and relative values without absolute foundations, then morality decays and life is no more than a pointless struggle for existence.'

Now part of this contention is very reasonable. It would be fairly widely admitted that the phrase ' better than.' or its linguistic equivalent, is one to which people do attach meaning: even though the philosophical analysis of this meaning is a very complicated matter. The function (using the word without teleological colouring) of the notion expressed in this phrase appears to be that it imposes a pattern on the 'manifold of experience.' It

is one of several such pattern-imposing relations, the most familiar of which is the egoistic one that classes occurrences as the ' experiences ' of certain persons, notably of oneself. The tendency to arrange occurrences in a pattern which associates certain ' experiences ' with one particular ' person ' is very strong and quite general. It is one's impression that the tendency to arrange occurrences in relationships controlled by the operator ' better than ' is usually almost equally strong. Mr. Roberts wishes to draw attention to the apparent weakening of this tendency in recent years, and to its unpleasant consequences for the individual, both directly, from an effect of boredom, and indirectly, through the resultant confusion or disappearance of social sanctions.

It does indeed seem to be the case that a sense of this kind has less force now than formerly it had; but its effectiveness in producing the desired results depends also upon the existence of a certain degree of uniformity in its applications by various members of a given group: that is, it is inadequate to feel or believe that some occurrence is better than some other occurrence unless someone else, and preferably several others, thinks so too. Whether some degree of uniformity is invariably present is a question which the relevant investigations by anthropologists and psychologists still leaves open. Mr. Roberts doesn't himself feel much doubt about the answer. ' The " prejudice " against adultery, for example, is not merely the result of misguided superstition or the jealousy of the middle-aged, nor is it merely the outcome of our laws of property: it is based on permanent facts about human nature, facts that can be verified in our own experience if we choose to take the risk.' When, therefore, he formulates his requirements for a rehabilitations of Western civilization, he not only demands a recrudescence of the sense of value, but has no misgivings about the relationships it should establish. ' Jealousy, greed, and wanton cruelty, and the loss of vitality that we call accidie or sloth, are recognized as evils.' The ' virtues of life ' are ' courage, prudence, generosity and truthfulness.' The ethical pattern Mr. Roberts would wish to re-establish is, in fact, approximately Christian.

And here, it seems to me, Mr. Roberts's own account of our plight undermines his proposed solution. ' The popular effect of relativity theory was to reinforce the belief that no judgments were absolutely valid; the effect of psychological theory was to instil a deep suspicion of all motives that seemed to be generous and altruistic.' It is in fact the case that the ' march of events ' has progressively eviscerated the significance of conceptions like ' greed ' or ' courage ' of which Mr. Roberts makes use. It is surely just because such conceptions were inadequate to express people's feelings about morality that ethical values in general became discredited. They were notions appropriate to an earlier stage in the process of acquiring information, and proved unsatisfactory standards for discriminating between more recent accretions of data. When (the analogy should be accepted, if at all, with caution) one possesses a row of files labelled ' Equipment,' ' Training ' and

' Reports,' and finds oneself with a letter in one's hand requesting an estimated price for a preparation for removing the colouring from military petrol, one initiates a new filing system. Again, Mr. Roberts, recognizing that the sense of value was once fortified by belief in supernatural authority, recommends a return to this belief; but again, it is surely just because the idea of supernatural authority, has, on Mr. Roberts's own showing, fallen into such discredit that the sense of value is at such a low ebb.

Mr. Roberts's implied analogy is with literature; and in analogous reflections on literature Mr. Eliot pointed out that the tradition that survived was one that was itself modified by the incorporation of every new work that it judged. It may very well be true that the reappearance of ethical patterns will signalize the arrival of a civilization less uniformly characterized by *ennui*, but this is hardly likely to be the ethical pattern whose inadequacy produced the original *impasse*. If a new pattern is to survive, it will have to be one that can accommodate and ' place ' the subversive concepts of the present century, the psycho-analysts and the logical positivists, not reject them merely because they do not fit. Mr. Roberts is likely to find, here and there, support for his contention that the existence of morality is desirable: it would be unfortunate if his arguments should persuade sympathisers to obstruct its rehabilitation.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

## MODERN VERSE AND THE ANTHOLOGIST

*A LITTLE BOOK OF MODERN VERSE, chosen by Anne Ridler, Preface by T. S. Eliot* (*Faber and Faber*, 3/6).

*PROSE CHANTS AND POEMS, by Ross Nichols* (*The Fortune Press*, 6/-).

*POETS OF TO-MORROW; 3rd SELECTION* (*Hogarth Press*, 7/6).

' Modern,' as applied to verse, has come to mean whatever its user is anxious that it should mean; and hence an anthology of modern verse, without explanation and vindication of the principles upon which it is chosen, must be exceptionally good indeed to avoid one of two main charges—that it is too arbitrarily and personally narrow in its scope, or that its comprehensiveness is so vague and general that it appears to have no critical direction, and hence little justification. The only two ' current ' anthologies—the Oxford and the Faber—are censurable on these grounds respectively, in spite of, perhaps because of, their introductory notes. Both Yeats and Michael Roberts give and illustrate their own ideas of Modern Verse, neither very satisfactorily; but at least they set down fairly clearly the purpose and the scheme of their anthologies, and lay themselves open to straightforward criticism accordingly. However wrongly they assert, however inadequately they appear to judge, they do not, at least, stand convicted of a too cautious reticence. Glancing at Yeats' selection, one would assume that he had decided to attach the meaning ' contemporary ' to the word, but from his rather odd

remark in the introduction—' I too have tried to be modern '—one gathers that, by ' modern verse ' he actually understood something very much more particular in manner than the selection of his anthology would suggest. Michael Roberts' anthology, as everyone must know, ' represents the most significant poetry of our age '; the types of modern poet are exhaustively, and rather exhaustingly, described and given their ' schools '; and it is with some surprise that one discovers that ' perhaps the most characteristic feature of the poems in this book is that they seldom record a recognized poetical experience.' Yet some of the poets represented are given ancestry in ' Langland, Skelton, and Doughty,' others in ' Blake, Shelley and perhaps, Edward Lear.' Now surely the readers who refused to ' recognize ' the poetical experience of Hopkins did so because he just wasn't a bit like Shelley. Mr. Roberts then proceeds to sketch characters of types of modern poet—' There is something of the dandy, something of the dilettante, in his make-up, but he is aware of the futility and evanescence of all this . . . etc., etc.'

If Mr. Yeats, Mr. Roberts and now Miss Ridler, had been less concerned with finding or suggesting a ' theory ' of modern poetry, and had chosen, with, perhaps, some comment on the qualities of the poets included, what they considered the best poems since Hopkins over as wide a field as they wished, regardless of ' modern ' or not ' modern,' we might have had three much more satisfactory anthologies. We could then have seen, perhaps, more clearly, just what sorts of serious work were being produced in this century, and we should have had a fuller understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the compilers. What we want to know is not whether the compiler considers, say, Dorothy Wellesley ' modern ' or not, but what he considers is her standing as a poet in relation to other poets, and why.

Mr. Eliot in his preface to Miss Ridler's ' Little Anthology,' admits that we cannot for some time have any precise idea of what ' modern poetry ' is; but Miss Ridler's anthology is, apparently, to suggest a definition which cannot be adequately formulated. Mr. Eliot is not prepared to commit himself upon the relative values of the poets represented. ' We can make more than a guess ' he says ' at the relative excellence of individual poets, even at the final place of some.' Surely if we can do this, we ought to do it, rather than attempt to see what ' modern poetry,' as a whole, appears to have in common. Mr. Eliot does not indicate what his ' more than a guess ' is, but proceeds to follow what is, in my opinion, a far less profitable course. ' What (the poets represented) have in common,' he says, ' can be perceived by sensibility, but not defined in words.' A study of what Eliot himself, Stephen Spender, Marianne Moore, D. H. Lawrence and Edith Sitwell have in common should not take very long for a person of any ' sensibility ' at all. Where and when, in a century, there is a positive ' manner ' perceptible in most departments of life, as in the early eighteenth century, a study of that manner will help to further the appreciation of the quality of individual work; but when, as at the present time, there are as many

totally distinct manners (many of them bad ones) as there are ' movements ' in literature, it seems more valuable to concentrate on poems, poets and particularities. Which does not mean personalities.

An anthology of this type can, I think, serve a more useful purpose than to attempt to give the reader the general ' feel ' of this century's poetry. If it hopes to encourage a more intelligent interest in modern poetry among those who have a mere nodding acquaintance with contemporary work, it must do more than suggest a definition which can be ' perceived by sensibility.' It must also develop and refine the sensibility which perceives. Such an anthology should expand and inform the reader's tastes as it increases his range of reference. For this a more careful selection, a bolder discrimination, and a clearer presentation of the compiler's standards, whether directly or by implication, are necessary. Ian Parson's *The Progress of Poetry* is such an anthology. Miss Ridler's selection of poems from individual poets is good (though she has carefully included the cheapest and most ephemeral of MacNeice); but she has apparently allotted them space according to what she considers their ' technical ' importance. They are represented, first as illustrations to a literary history of the period, second as poets. Edward Thomas, for example, is excluded, presumably as being ' traditional.' Rosenberg is given one poem, to Herbert Read's three. Lawrence is represented, I think, out of all proportion to his value as a poet. Had the choice been first of good poems, then the value of the book as illustration would have been increased. Having seen something of the best, the public would not have had to look very far to see something of the worst. As it is, I am left with no very clear indication that Miss Ridler thinks ' modern poetry ' can be valueless at all. ' Modern ' has become a term of general approbation as ' Victorian ' of condescension and disapproval.

Looking at the other volumes here, I wonder if ' the modern poet ' isn't perhaps, becoming too deliberately and superficially experimental, too genuinely imitative? The poets in *Poets of Tomorrow, Third Series,* have all their theories and slogans, briefly given as introductions to their work. I think they probably work too consciously to the book. They know all about the Modern Poet (Michael Roberts has told them if no one else has); they have the necessary rag-tag and bobtail of knowledge ; they have a certain facility in the use of words; and, incongruously, they show occasional flashes of genuine poetic talent when they forget, for a moment, the recipe. If only they hadn't learned their lesson so thoroughly! But their work is filled with recollections of most earlier contemporary writing. They love to manipulate words for their own sake. The images and words which were stimulating and original when used by Eliot are, unconsciously, copied and impoverished. The result is a modern ' poetic diction.' Symbols which were once rich with meaning are now conventionally used for conventionally 'poetic' states of mind. Rats and bones are *à la mode*. To modify the words of the introduction to the Faber Book, there is an extension of sig-

nificance into insignificance. Take this, in the later Joycian manner, from *Prose Chants and Poems*—' Anatomy ' :

> Spewpan of throatbase
> Wheezing lyre in the *Neckwork*
> whiff-whaff breathtunnel
> (microbian wingtester)
> trembling occasional adjusted, teethlips manoeuvred.

Here is an example of what I mean by the new Poetic Diction, from David Gascoyne—

> Let streams of sweetest air dissolve the blight
> And poison of the News, which every hour
> Contaminates the ether.

Now hear the reminiscences :—

Lawrence Little in MacNeice's popular and inferior manner :—

> Nursing these fish and chips
> That pulse in a greasy shadow of life
> And drip their warm oil through my fingertips
> Maudlin before the knife . . .

Adam Drinan, in the manner of *Murder in the Cathedral* :—

> We know the sudden fist on the jaw
> The kick in the belly,
> The savage taking and drunken forgetting
> Endless days and no tomorrow.

Laurie Lee, from Edith Sitwell :—

> The sun cries through his fingers
> To a herd of scarlet asses
> And the green horizon throws
> Shutters on the oranges.

David Gascoyne, remembering Eliot :—

> Hearing a clack of feet that died away
> Down the dim passage, and the small nerveless din
> Child voices made behind us.

David Gascoyne, remembering, perhaps, Ramsay Macdonald :—

> Having left all false hopes behind, may we move on
> At a vertiginous unmeasured speed, beyond, beyond,
> Across this unknown Present's bleak and rock plain . . .

I do not say that all these are bad ; but they do seem a little musty. And they could be multiplied. There are occasional sober and not unpleasant passages ; but there are also patches of lurid and coruscating imagery, in which the individual words take on a dazzle of their own, preventing the reader from following the central theme. They decorate, but they do not reinforce or ramify, the structure of the poem.

There is something, perhaps much, to be said on the other side. But these, we are told, are the Poets of Tomorrow. Will tomorrow ever come? The present showing makes one anxious ; and uncom-

promising and direct criticism is, perhaps, one way of ensuring that we have not reached conclusion when Mr. Eliot stiffens in a rented house.

R. G. LIENHARDT.

## RECENT POLITICAL THEORY

*THE THREE LAWS OF POLITICS, by R. G. Collingwood* (*Oxford University Press, 2/-*).

*THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND, by David Thomson.*

*DEMOCRACY: THE THREATENED FOUNDATIONS, by Reginald Lennard* (*Cambridge University Press, 3/6 each*).

There have been few recent contributions of value to political philosophy in this country, and the subject seems likely to remain a philosophical Cinderella for some time to come. It can scarcely be a sufficient explanation of its neglect that the times are too disturbed for men to consider the underlying principles of political action with the necessary deliberation and detachment; for disturbed conditions have called out a number of the classics of political thought, the works, for instance, of Plato and Hobbes. Neither of them could be called detached, but both were stimulated by the ills of the body politic to attack the problems raised by those ills in a radical fashion. Deeper explanations are perhaps to be found, on the one hand, in the often diagnosed absence of deeply held positive convictions in the countries that claim to represent the tradition of Western Christendom and liberal democracy, on the other, in the fact that political theory is a border-line subject, apt either to be swallowed up by history, economics, sociology or general moral philosophy, or else to be neglected by philosophers themselves, in the belief that there is nothing left to discuss once the sciences mentioned have staked out their claims.

Of the three works to be reviewed here, only one, Mr. Collingwood's Hobhouse Lecture, is strictly philosophical, and it does not afford much nourishment. The most interesting thing about it is the note on the first page, which states that it contains the substance of a chapter of an unfinished book to be called *The New Leviathan*. It is gratifying that Mr. Collingwood should be conscious of the need for an attempt on the grand scale implied by such a title, but I cannot think that he was well-advised to publish this slight extract in separate form. As an independent contribution to the subject, it is oddly trivial and desultory, and I should advise anyone who (very rightly) is anxious to know what Mr. Collingwood thinks about political philosophy to wait till *The New Leviathan* is published.

But, without giving any general account of the lecture, I should like to touch on a characteristic of it which illustrates one of the causes for the unsatisfactory state of political philosophy. There are three pages whose confusions are too manifest to be attributed to the mere occasional inadvertence that is liable to attack anyone. They seem rather to arise from a deep-seated conflict between strong feelings and the desire to maintain a proper academic detachment.

Like all of us, Collingwood must feel a strong impulse to hurl anathemas at many contemporary manifestations of human folly, wickedness, and perverseness. But this would not be academically respectable. ' Was it not Green's business as a political scientist,' asks Mr. Collingwood with regard to an alleged lapse on the part of that writer, ' to analyse facts without indulging in condemnation?' Hence, if my diagnosis is correct, Mr. Collingwood's artificially bottled-up passion, deprived of its proper outlet, the calm and measured recognition of what is intrinsically evil *as* evil, finds vent in distorted argument and perilous quasi-scientific generalization. A trivial example of the latter: Mr. Collingwood declines to follow Green in ' scolding the Tsar of all the Russias, and by anticipation Hitler and Mussolini into the bargain, 'but he has no hesitation in backing up a reference to a deeply-rooted incapacity in Germany to understand the elements of political theory, by a quotation from the *Imitation of Christ*, a work (I am told) by no means certainly of German origin (unless Mr. Collingwood has as generous a conception of the boundaries of *Deutschtum* as the most ambitious pan-Germanic theorists), while the quotation itself, if it is anything more than commonplace or orthodox Christianity, is an example of a quite general danger attaching to Catholic quietism. Such generalization so illustrated sounds much more ' scientific ' and philosophic than the condemnation of certain features of National Socialism (or any other system) as morally wrong ; but I believe that (to take an example from a recent work with no philosophical pretensions) it is more truly philosophic simply to recognise that ' men and women who have reached a certain stage of development in fact *feel*—recognise instinctively as a matter no longer to be disputed—that certain things at least are " good," and that other things at least are " bad "; and that, above all, love and respect for others are " good," and that, hate and disrespect for others—a disrespect issuing in every species of enslavement—are " bad." ' (Victor Gollancz, *Russia and Ourselves*, p. 73. It is rather a sad comment on the influence of bad philosophy that a man conscious of not being an expert in ethics should feel so nervous of the words ' good ' and ' bad ' that he has to put them in inverted commas.)

I have given an instance of Mr. Collingwood's hasty generalisations: of the confusions of the passage two examples will suffice. Green is said to be wrong in refusing the name of State to a community so unfree as Russia, first because such a refusal is really a ' practical ' statement (*i.e.* either an evocative or an expressive one—Mr. Collingwood does not distinguish the two), and not a ' scientific ' one ; secondly because a state (or body politic) has as part of its connotation the opposite of freedom as well as (some degree of) freedom. Green in other words is not making a scientific statement at all, but he is also making a false scientific statement. It might be retorted that the accusations are meant as alternative ; but if Green's words are, as the second accusation implies capable of conveying a false scientific statement, why assume that he is not making a scientific statement at all, as is assumed in the first

accusation?

Then the rebuke to Green for unphilosophically ' scolding ' the Tsar is backed up by the suggestion that the Chamberlain government (not, I suppose, held up as a body of philosopher-kings!) was right in not exposing the horrors of the concentration camps at a time when the exposure might have precipitated an untimely war—a suggestion which, right or wrong, has no relevance to the question what types of statement a philosopher as such ought to permit himself.

But I do not want to lose myself in details—only to point out the unfortunate *theoretical* results which, if I am right, attend the attempt to maintain an unnatural moral neutrality in political philosophy.

The other two books both belong to one of the series of popular works on topics of current interest which have been springing up so freely especially since the war began. These series fall roughly into the two groups, informative and propagandist, and these two books belong to an informative series. To some extent they overlap, and the fact that they do, though it makes one wonder just why the later one, Mr. Lennard's, was included at all, makes instructive comparison possible. As it happens, the contrast could hardly be more complete, I do not imagine that in basic beliefs Mr. Thomson and Mr. Lennard stand very far apart ; none the less the former has given us a spirited and sober sketch answering perfectly the purpose of such a series, whereas the latter has merely strung together a set of clichés to form a book which, though obviously the product of a humane mind, is very dull, and, for the purpose of outlining a subject and stimulating to further thought, quite useless.

*The Democratic Ideal in France and England* illustrates well what I was saying about the position of political philosophy as a border-line subject. Mr. Thomson does not in fact claim to be writing philosophy—' the historical approach is,' he says, ' at present more useful than the philosophical.' But his illuminating account of the similarities and differences of democratic institutions in France and England is, if not philosophy, at least written by one whose philosophic competence is plain, and the way in which the discussion is firmly tied down to historical particularities makes the absence of rigorous definition of terms such as ' democracy ' an advantage rather than a source of obfuscation, as it is for instance in Mr. Lennard's less historical treatment. One's confidence in Mr. Thomson may be expressed by saying that he has obviously not put all his goods in the window. It is not a labour to read him, and he has no airs of profundity, but that is a sign of the hard work he has put into making the discussion as clear as the subject admits of. It would be a pleasure to quote and discuss many passages, but a general and hearty recommendation must suffice. The book is a model in that holding of the balance between detailed information and broad generalization which is a virtue particularly proper to the type of popularisation it belongs to.

J. C. MAXWELL.

# ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP, ENGLISH AND AMERICAN

*ESSAYS IN CRITICISM AND RESEARCH, by Geoffrey Tillotson* (*Cambridge University Press*, 15/-).

*THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD, a commentary by C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry* (*Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press*, 12/6).

Some years ago Mr. F. W. Bateson's *English Poetry and the English Language* occasioned a lively debate in this journal over his claim that literary history could be studied apart from criticism. Mr. Tillotson's preface raises similar problems, in spite of an appearance of greater subtlety. He begins promisingly with the statement that the critic must concentrate on the material manifestation of literature, its embodiment in words. But a little later, quoting Mark Pattison's remark that an appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship, he propounds as a ' positive critical ideal ' the reconstruction of a work ' as it lay under the sabbath eye of its author.' ' I am assuming,' he adds naïvely, ' that the poem is a good one.' Plainly this begs all the questions: while the critic will of course make sure that the apparent lifelessness of a work is not due to some ignorance of relevant information on his own part, some accident of changed conventions or diction, his chief concern will still be to decide whether or not the work has significance beyond its own age and environment. And this is inseparable from the process of determining its value. Perhaps Mr. Tillotson would not disagree, but if he thinks this means a crude reading into the past of modern interests in the manner of those ' small creative essayists ' whom he so justly castigates, he should look again at Mr. Eliot's passage about ' the mind of Europe ' in *Tradition* and the *Individual Talent*. Our suspicions are aroused, and however much he protests that the function of historical reconstruction is inseparable from that of criticism, we feel that the weight always tends to fall on the side of scholarship. He takes no account of the many insidious ways in which scholarship can become a mask for critical prejudice. The critic, we know, must have a ' highly developed sense of fact,' but the facts to which he directs his attention will inevitably be selected by a more or less conscious critical choice. It is as well to admit from the start that this interaction is unavoidable: we are not dealing with the measurable objects of exact science.

Other sections of the preface deal with the dangers of textual inaccuracy, misquotation, lack of attention to the contemporary meanings of words and the tendency to read back the present into the past. With most of this we can agree, and the examples are usually convincing[1] (*Seven Types of Ambiguity* is, one must admit,

[1]But even these are not always questions of pure scholarship: for example, the suggested correction of pointing in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* still leaves the interpretation a matter for critical judgment.

fair game, though Mr. Tillotson does it considerably less than justice.) But when it comes to defending the relevance of biography with the suggestion that a critic learning of Keats's youthful pugnacity ' may be led to notice, perhaps for the first time, some quality in the bone and flesh of the poems themselves,' we must protest. A critic who cannot discern such qualities without the help of biography will be in great danger of finding in the poems many things which are not there at all.

I have spent some time over Mr. Tillotson's preface because its principles are supposed to underlie the rather heterogeneous collection of essays which follows. Some of these are just scholarly notes —the derivation of *Rasselas,* the exact dates of certain performances of *The Alchemist* and *Othello,* and, appropriately, a detailed bibliographical account of the reprinting of Housman's contributions to a college magazine. We are not surprised to find that they are balanced by a group of essays only vaguely connected with literature which recall in their polite inanity and facetiousness the fourth leaders of *The Times.* This irritating tone is found in work of higher pretentions (*Epithets in English Poetry, William Morris and Machines*); working upwards we come to imitations of Virginia Woolf—the essay on Bacon, which the preface claims as a new approach, is sheer pastiche: ' He seems often, indeed, to have written with his head severed and placed cleanly before him on the table, an inch or two beyond the farther edge of his manuscript.' For the most part Mr. Tillotson makes a few critical perceptions go a long way, wrapping them up in elaborate wit and elegant cadences, which presumably is what the blurb-writer means by ' a prose full of light-giving surprises.'

It is only fair to say, nevertheless, that the worst essays are the earliest, and that some are more truly critical and not without interest. The notes on Lyly's dramatic prose and the discussion of Elizabethan Decoration would be useful to undergraduates reading English, though they would need warnings against a list of examples which includes lines from *The Passionate Pilgrim, Richard II, Macbeth* and *The Winter's Tale* without adequate discrimination. The attempts to rehabilitate Gray and Collins do not answer Johnson's objections, and he at least cannot be accused of lacking the required scholarship. Mr. Tillotson is at his best in the two essays on Pope and the two on Eighteenth Century Poetic Diction. The latter pair perform a useful corrective function but they attempt to prove too much: it is difficult to believe, however carefully we investigate the reasons for the use of poetic diction, that we shall cease to find most eighteenth century verse after Pope ' intolerably poetical.' The essays on Pope make some interesting minor points, but they miss the essentials—and that indeed is characteristic of the whole book. It seems to be a usual academic fault to concentrate on secondary issues—for fear, perhaps, of being too serious.

*The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* is not criticism, but a commentary on every poem in the collected works (it forms a sort of companion volume to a new complete edition), giving information about

sources, mode of composition, relation to the poet's life, philosophy and so on. The authors claim to have given incidentally an account of the connexion between Arnold's poetry and this thought and to have thrown light on the early cessation of his poetical life. Those who expect to learn something new about Marguerite will be disappointed: the visitors' book of the Hotel Bellevue at Thun was destroyed long ago and the authors drew a blank altogether. The book does contain relevant facts and interesting scraps of biographical material, but no one who had really read Arnold critically could have contemplated an undertaking of this sort. That the critical remarks should take for granted all the accepted academic judgments on the poems is as inevitable as that there should be an appendix by a former Warden of Rhodes House describing the Scholar-Gipsy Country with a sketch map. Almost the only portions which a critic might conceivably find useful are the quotations from letters and the discussion of the change in Arnold's attitude to religion in the notes on *Resignation, Empedocles,* the *Obermann* poems and *Rugby Chapel.* The rest is thorough, conscientious and dead. ' It is not true,' said Dr. Richards once, ' to say that criticism is a luxury trade,' but it is almost certainly true of this kind of scholarship.

R. G. Cox.

## SHCHEDRIN: THE RUSSIAN SWIFT

*SHCHEDRIN'S FABLES, translated by Vera Volkhovsky (The Pelham Library. Published by Chatto and Windus,* 2/6).

Shchedrin (Saltykov was his real name) lived from 1826 to 1889. Born into the lesser nobility, he was exiled for his first novel but continued to work in the Russian civil service, where he occupied several high positions. He wrote a great deal of satire, the mass of which, according to authorities, had little more than a topical interest. Such is his lengthy *History of a City,* a parody which bears some surface resemblance to *Gulliver's Travels*—though it is more because he is Russia's most famous satirist that he has been called the Russian Swift. However, two of his works—a collection of *Fables* and a novel—are obviously of permanent value, and the translation by Natalie Duddington of the novel, *The Golovlyov Family,*[1] is a book that should rank with Aylmer Maude's and Constance Garnett's translations of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

Shchedrin has been unjustly neglected in England ; his novel as Mrs. Duddington presents it is far more interesting than much Russian writing that has won wide popularity over here. And the publication in a cheap edition of Vera Volkhovsky's neat translations of the *Fables* is an opportunity to draw attention to him.

The Fable is a dangerous art-form, because in the correlation of individual and action with universal and meaning the former is apt

[1]Shchedrin's *Golovlyov Family* translated by Natalie Duddington, used to be obtainable in *Everyman.*

to become dull or stilted, and the latter consequently unmoving, unconvincing ; the human or animal characters have, so to speak, too much of an eye on posterity, and their posturing is theatrical and clumsy. But Shchedrin's fables, as we have them here, read like plain ' human interest ' tales (they are extremely witty) and the symbolism, the moral lesson, evolves unobtrusively and only becomes palpable, all of a whole—as a kind of precipitate—when the story is finished. That is, there is not the irritation of a conscious and continuous back-and-forward correlation trailed through the narrative. They are fables rather in the way that Kafka's stories are fables (though the intention behind them is altogether different);[2] the reader knows that it is a fable he is reading, but nevertheless the abstract heart beats well in the background and the blood it is forcing through the story is not clogged with symbolism. To put it simply, the moral implications emerge quite forcibly from, but do not govern, the tale—there are no rumblings from a turgid mechanism—and if in the end we are taught to respect Courage it will not be through contemplating St. George astride a Dragon. The moral is to be compared to a shadow thrown by the story. In fact so much of that Shchedrin's method is as near to that of ' art ' in general as to that of the *fabliaux* proper: it lies between ' pure ' art (with the moral implicit) on one side and specifically didactic art, or allegory, on the other. It is not the latter because of a subtler and livelier handling, and it is not the former because of the stable sense, a certain pervasive atmosphere, that the events and characters are seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Moral abstractions do not clutter up the landscape, but they are, nonetheless, only just round the corner, for the didacticism does not reside merely in the gradual penetrative ' teaching ' of good literature, that kind of didacticism which depends on the energetic mutual co-operation of art and audience. It would be wrong to deny the aptness of Shchedrin's own title, *Fables*, but the description needs a certain qualification.

Shchedrin's satire is sophisticated (though not indiscriminate) in that it is usually directed against the exponents of both sides of a question, against both parties in a given dispute—against the hot-air idealist (for which see Tchehov) and also the complacent 'realist' or defender of the status quo ; against those who oppress and those who have grown in love with their oppression ; against the husband who has made a fool of himself and the wife who has made a fool of her husband ; against the wolf who murders and those who offer the wolf soulful advice. But generally it is what seems the lesser evil (the ' good intention ') that he is attacking—for the simple reason

[2]There is also a very slight resemblance to Kafka in that both are occupied with the apparatus of bureaucracy—but of course in very different ways. Shchedrin is satirising the *tchinovnik*, the red tape which he had experienced personally, as such, while Kafka is using it as symbol of the elusiveness of the wished-for absolute, the central core, and the resultant spiritual strain and frustration suffered by the struggling outcast or the bewildered victim.

that the greater evil is self-evident. The Deceitful Newspaper Man whose only consideration in what he prints is its profit-value really needs no more than a passing buffet—it is the Credulous Reader, who apparently can't make as good use of true news as he did of false, who needs the whip. And the Liberal is a worthy lofty-minded man, but in order to preserve his noble ideals he has to usher them into the realm of practice safely wrapped up in the catch-phrase 'within the limits of possibility.' He must even employ that useful device known as ' by adjustment to rascality,' and this fable ends:

> 'What an extraordinary thing!' the Liberal said to his friend: ' there's no rain, there are no slops, and yet I've wet on my cheek!'
>
> ' Do you see a man lurking round the corner there?' returned the friend. ' He did it! He wanted to spit at you for your Liberal doings, but he had not the courage to do it straight in your face. So he, ' by adjustment to rascality,' spat from round the corner, and the wind brought it you.'

Shchedrin knows that the reformer's task is no easy one, that sometimes what blatantly needs to be eradicated is so integral a part of the structure, social or spiritual, that an impasse seems to have been reached. *The Poor Wolf* is a merciless destroyer and the whole of animal and human creation live in fear and hatred of him, but he does not murder by his own will but simply because he cannot eat anything other than meat, and meat implies murder (the public-spirited and humane Bear who seeks to waken the Wolf's conscience needs only honey and raspberries to sustain him). This is not a case for regeneration through conscience: only death can release the Wolf from the necessity of killing and his prey from the inevitability of being killed. One of the finest characteristics of Russian literature is its refusal to dismiss evil as an embarrassing psychological quirk.

*The Carp who was an Idealist* and *The Siskin's Tragedy* seem to me two of the best—both of them comic and tragic as well. The Carp is a progressive thinker, high-minded advocate of a Fishes' Commonwealth—' I believe in peaceful, bloodless success, I believe in harmony . . . Now if only all the fishes agreed together . . .'—and to him it seems most irrational and unjust and altogether wrong that the Pike should feed off a poor harmless carp that has committed no crime whatsoever. For he himself, the Carp, restricts his appetite to shellfish, and

> ' The shellfish hasn't a soul—only a mist ; you eat shellfish and it doesn't understand. And it's constructed so that you can't help but swallow it. You draw in water with your mouth and straightaway your throat is chockfull of shellfish. I don't catch them. They swarm into my mouth of themselves. But a carp—that's quite different . . .'

The Siskin, a retired major from the Commissariat Department, decides to marry a canary since once he happened to come by a bargain in a consignment of canary seed. But he makes an ignoble

husband and his flighty young wife treats him very shabbily. Why?

> Who knows? A Canary's soul is unfathomable, and not a single wise man can disentangle within it where the graceful flutter of thought ends, and where begins the wish to torture.

These two fables demonstrate that the bestiary is an art-form that need not be clumsy, dull, or portentous, or ever obsolete. And the description of the *barynia,* the lady of the manor, in *A Village Fire* is worth quoting. One remembers the strained brilliance of the Petersburg society in *War and Peace,* and Dostoyevsky's denunciation of the deracinated nobility who despised their own language and national character and lived in a froth of Voltaireanism and French *bon mots*:

> Anna Andreyevna was a general's widow, some forty odd years old, still handsome and specially remarkable at balls and evening parties, where décolleté was obligatory, and where her bust drew the gaze of men of all ages and all weapons. But she had once for all said to herself, *' Ni, ni, c'est fini,'* and gave her life wholly to her children. This caused society to say of her, *'C'est une saint,'* and for her patriotism she was styled *' fière matrone.'* Like all Russian ladies, she spoke French, knew *un peu d'Arithmétique, un peu de Géographie, et un peu de Mythologie* (*cette pauvre Léda*!), had lived much abroad, and had lately become a patriot and taken to loving ' the good Russian people.'

The parenthesis is a little masterpiece.

It is very fitting that the fable called *The Virtues and the Vices* should be placed at the end of this book. This, a straightforward little allegory populated by personifications of the Virtues (who are not entirely attractive) and the Vices (who are not entirely repellent), describes how a rapprochement highly profitable to both parties is arranged by an indeterminate creature called Hypocrisy, who had been properly educated at Madame Comme-il-faut's boarding school (the air of which, however, was saturated with the ' can-can ' influence). For, not unexpectedly, it is hypocrisy that is Shchedrin's chief abomination, and his most important work, the novel *The Golovlyov Family,* is a consummate study of a ghastly kind of hypocrisy in which the villain's unending gush of slimy loquacity deceives even himself about the true nature of his motives.

The *Fables* are only minor art (several of them are unique little gems) but the novel is clearly a masterpiece. Reading it, one is struck by its remarkable onesidedness: the characters are without exception either loathsome or pitiful (the interwoven story of the two innocents, Anninka and Lubinka, is sickening. Golovlyovo is a Wuthering Heights in terms of sordidness, greed and utter baseness, and Iudushka, the chief character, is the apotheosis of the mealy-mouth ; in his freedom from anything approaching shame, in his self-sufficiency and the impregnability of his self-deception (for as Shchedrin points out, he is not a simple specimen of conscious hypocrisy), he touches heroic heights—and he is an artist in his

eloquence, that wordy fermentation of platitudes, fine phrases, religiosity and ' Christian ' resignation to the sufferings of others, all of which signifies precisely nothing. But at the bottom of this cesspool his conscience is still breathing, and it makes a painful emergence during his last days. It is important to realize that the ' death-bed repentance,' as we have it here and elsewhere in Russian writers, is not a pi-faced anacoluthon perpetrated by a scared or incompetent author (which is perhaps how we have come to regard it), but is a completely logical and honest event, and one without which the pristine wickedness and horrors would have no meaning.

English novelists of the same time (and perhaps it is not necessary to make this temporal qualification) tend to fight shy of evolving a repentance at all adequate to sins committed—and I am not using these words in an exclusively religious sense ; the effort to poise a convincing moral depravity with an equally convincing contrition is generally outside either their capacity or their aim ; what is apparently preferred is the kind of ' psychological ' transformation effected by some such objective factor as marriage (' a good girl's influence ') or a more satisfying vocation, and so on—or even unrepentant death which leaves the field clear for the less equivocal performance of the good, or better, characters. I am not suggesting that this is less worthy than that concentration on individual salvation through individual effort, by means of the direct activity of the individual conscience, which we find in Dostoyevsky and (for instance) in Tolstoy's fine story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich,* but I am just tentatively suggesting a very general but useful distinction between the English novel and the Russian novel as English readers understand that term.

To recapitulate, in the Russian novel there is not that stiffness in the juxtaposition of good and evil, that immiscibility of opposed moral qualities, which we tend to find in our own novel.[3] And so, though the confidently vile Iudushka (' little Judas ') lives through over three hundred pages and the broken, bewildered, questioning Iudushka (too much of a wreck to be called ' regenerate ') appears only in the last eight, yet there is no sense of falsity or incompetence in the novel's conclusion. In the last few pages Iudushka is just as moving—as both a tragic and a pitiful figure—as he was repulsive in the rest of the book. In cold blood it is difficult to believe that, however ingenious the author, one could ever be brought to feel sympathy for Iudushka ' the bloodsucker,' but Shchedrin succeeds in evoking this emotion. And it is exactly this success that makes *The Golovlyov Family* such an outstanding piece of work.

We are indebted to Mrs. Duddington and Vera Volkhovsky for two such readable translations. They deserve to be better known.

D. J. ENRIGHT.

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[3]Of course, there is the very popular ' mixed character,' the boyo who sows his wild oats but is founded on a rock—but to talk here of ' good ' or ' bad ' in any serious sense of either of the words is quite out of place. That awful Pendennis, for example, represents not miscibility but plain mess.

# GRAMOPHONE RECORDS·

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The bark of the lone-wolf Mr. Ernest Newman has at last evoked a chorus of assenting yaps, and the music of Ernest Bloch is beginning to receive something like adequate recognition, as the recording, during the past year or so, of the Violin Concerto, of *Schelemo,* of the Suite for viola and piano, and now of the Quintet and Quartet, abundantly testifies. And it is high time, for there can be no doubt that he is one of the very few contemporary composers who have real vitality and originality of thought. His vigour is largely of a traditional order, for Bloch is almost an epic composer in the way in which he transforms the traditional idioms of the Jewish race into a personal medium for the conveyance of intensely personal thought, so that the exiled and persecuted Jew becomes, in his music, as it were symbolic of the exile of the twentieth-century artist. Only seldom does Bloch quote traditional tunes ; but his melodic sense derives from the characteristic formulae of the modalism of ancient Hebraic music in its enormous rhapsodic sweep, its complex yet grand rhythmic organization, its quasi-oriental melismata, its syncopations on the strong beat, its pentatonic figures combined with sinewy augmented seconds in certain more or less conventional rhythmic periods of triplets and quintuplets.

Melodically, Bloch's music has thus the passion of immense antiquity : the ' modern ' aspects of his work consist in the more subjective feeling which is communicated to the emotion through a tendency to render hysterical an already agitated or vibrant line by immense leaps, by a preoccupation with the intervals of minor ninth and major seventh, by the use of quarter-tones to fray, as it were, the line's contour, by an agonized insistence on some specific metrical formation ; and, above all, through that modal fecundity and those fluid juxtapositions of tonalities that go to produce an elaborate and sophisticated harmonic dialect whereby the composer exploits both the piano and the orchestra in a manner that is predominantly ' nervous ' and colouristic. The introspective Debussy, who himself considerably influenced Bloch during the days of the Jewish composer's apprenticeship (the influence survives strongly into so mature a work as the first movement of the String quartet), found stimulus for the exploration of his impressionistic sonorities in contemporary exotic music, particularly that of Russia; and it is in the tetrachordal nature of Bloch's harmony, more than in any other aspect of his art, that the ancient, traditional Levantine traits of his sensibility become reconciled with those elements that are modern, personal and occidental.

Yet perhaps there are dangers inherent in the very nature of this

duality, for while I can see that Bloch is a fine composer and a masterful personality, I find it more difficult than does, say, Mr. Ernest Newman to accept him as a great one. Intensity of feeling, even originality of feeling, do not alone make a great artist ; one looks for some ability to organize those feelings, for some kind of insight or ' wisdom '; call it what you will, it is in this respect that Bloch seems to me normally to fall short. The virtue of his music lies in its virulent, expansive lyrical utterance, but this utterance is rhapsodic with both the strength and limitations that rhapsody implies. I know that Bloch deplores the imputation of rhapsody, though this is after all merely a shorthand means of referring to a legitimate aspect of his technique and certainly doesn't mean that all his music is aimless improvisation: and it is true that Bloch generally tries to give his rhapsody intensity and concentration by preserving in his very free structures links with classical symphonic procedure—even the Scherzo of the Quartet, one of his most patently episodic movements, depends on a subterranean conflict between two tonal centres, significantly spaced, however, at the tritone, the most recondite diatonic relation ; while the trio of this movement, for all its weirdly heterophonic rhythms and polytonality, is orthodox in lay-out. Yet in a sense Bloch's sonata characteristics tend to be external ; they are *used* to give power and incisiveness to the expression, but they are not normally (there are, as we shall see, significant exceptions) the ' inevitable ' product of an interior organization of emotion. In the Quartet and the Violin Concerto, for instance, the pattern of motives is throughout complicated and ingenious but the mood episodically makes the musical logic rather than the two being inseparable. The concerto in particular seems to me virtually over as a formal entity at the end of the first movement: the other two movements are often beautiful enough, but structurally are in the nature of an extension of or commentary on a work already complete. Only a genius could make rhapsody so musically integral and satisfying: but a great genius would transcend rhapsody in a true simplicity (which includes within itself complexity) of form.

The defects of Bloch's music become more apparent as rhapsodic lyrical speech becomes temporarily subservient to boldness of rhythm of the extra-melodic sort that is associated with dancing and physical movement, or to complexity of harmonic and sonorous device. The gibbering spectral Scherzo of the Quartet is moving, even terrifying, but one cannot avoid the suspicion that it is too easily so, that it makes so direct an assault on the nerves as to appear in the long run almost melodramatic: while in his piano writing the balance between intensity and rhetoric becomes increasingly precarious. When the traditional Hebraic element dictates, when the piano is complementary to the ecstatic lyricism of a voice or solo instrument, as in the piano quintet or the second violin sonata, the superimposed sonorities and harmonic acridities of the piano part are most often (though not always) authentic and beautiful: when, as in the piano sonata, there is no clearly defined ' vocal '

line to vitalize a conception of music that is fundamentally homophonic, the effect is apt to grow turgid and confused. The case of Bloch, as a rhapsodist, is therefore comparable with the case of Bax discussed elsewhere in this issue. Perhaps Bloch is the more aggressively contemporary composer ; and perhaps the percentage of improvisatory wish-wash in his work is low relative to that in the oeuvre of Bax : but nonetheless there is something about the virility of Bloch's music that frequently approaches dangerously near to the synthetic. Too often there is a discrepancy between the ferocious rhythmic pulse of the music and its essentially episodic melodic development, so that for all its loudly insistent energy the music's movement, lacking lyrical growth, remains fundamentally static : still more frequently the deficiency of melodic evolution is artificially compensated for by injecting vitality into the music through the hysterical piling up of sequences particularly in rising minor thirds, often culminating in a wild leap; while, except in the Sacred Service and parts of the violin concerto, Bloch's music contains relatively little true, musically disciplined polyphony, grief passages of fugato habitually being used in a non-evolutionary manner to heighten the hysteria.

Even, therefore, as an expression of a phase of post-war consciousness, of the twentieth-century jitters, the piano sonata or the scherzo of the quartet seem to me inferior to many works of Bartók which are much more besides; here is violence in plenty, and some tenderness of an order so sweetly piercing as to be almost painful, but of tranquillity in the true classic sense there is scarcely a trace. As I have pointed out, Bax attains in the viola sonata (not to mention the epilogue to the third symphony) to a repose that comes of self-knowledge and of the perfect realization, and I would maintain (though Bloch enthusiasts would probably consider the Bax work merely the product of a limited nostalgia compared with their master's stark profundity) that the sonata for viola and piano is not only a more successful, complete and artistic, but also a more *valuable* work than Bloch's ramshackle Suite for the same two instruments. Admittedly, when Bloch does achieve the classical virtues his music is probably more profound than anything in Bax : but it is well that we should see his best in perspective. The Sacred Service (where the necessity to adapt himself to an ecclesiastical function checks his personal hysteria) the first two movements of the violin concerto (particularly the polyphonic passages), the slow movement of the second violin sonata, the epilogues to the quartet and quintet and above all the quintet's slow movement—these are among the very greatest things in twentieth-century music, and they are enough for one man's reputation. They will remain unassailable when we come to reflect that Bloch's music, like Bax's first and second symphonies only more so, is apt to protest so much that it almost bullies one into discovering profundities in it that it cannot properly pretend to ; and they will make it clear that he is a big composer, less noble and heroic than the Bax of the large-scale works.

Of the two works here recorded the finer is the piano quintet. The first movement, with its vehement quarter-tones to give edge to the lines' passion, is probably the most authentic and breath-taking expression in Bloch's oeuvre of his typical Hebraic-contemporary hysteria: the slow movement is probably his greatest and most sustained piece of music, particularly remarkable in that its cumulative movement, creating a characteristic prickle of the scalp, is genuinely the product of its lyrical growth and not, as so often, something separable from it; while the (more oriental) finale, with its wonderful C major resolution in the epilogue, is worthy of what has preceded. If one can afford only one work of Bloch, this should be it, particularly since the performance is impeccable and the recording admirable.

The quartet is a big work in more than size and it is good to have it recorded even if imperfectly. I must admit, however, that the strident quality of the (American) recording here unpleasantly accentuates the characteristic vices of the music and somewhat blurs its virtues: whether the performance too is at fault is in the circumstances difficult to judge. Of the other more or less recent Bloch recordings the best is that of the violin Concerto. This is superbly played by Szigeti, and it is interesting to compare the original, integral, glowing orchestration of this work (which is very well recorded) with the much more lurid and virulent tonal colours of the spasmodic *Schelemo* (which is rather harshly recorded). The viola Suite, though finely played by William Primrose, is not a composition I would recommend as a Bloch initiation.

W.H.M.

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The following articles dealing with University education have appeared in *Scrutiny*:

SCRUTINY OF MODERN GREATS, E. W. F. Tomlin, Mar., 1936.
THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES, L C. Knights, March, 1938.
THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES: A POSTSCRIPT,
L. C. Knights, June, 1938.
EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY:
(i) SKETCH FOR AN ENGLISH SCHOOL.
(ii) CRITICISM AND COMMENT.
(iii) LITERARY STUDIES.

The three last, by F. R. Leavis, appeared in September and December, 1940 ; and March, 1941.

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